THE WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW TO SOUND SMART

1,200 ESSENTIAL WORDS EVERY SOPHISTICATED PERSON SHOULD BE ABLE TO USE

ROBERT W. BLY

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DEDICATION

For Peter Archer, a saint among men

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INTRODUCTION

A Few Words about a Few Words

A radio commercial for a mail-order course on building your vocabulary states, “People judge you by the words you use.” Now, with The Words You Should Know to Sound Smart, people who hear you speak will see you as smart—perhaps even smarter than you really are.

Some people who want to sound smart have cultivated a large vocabulary, which they unleash with great regularity. This book can serve as your “translator” when speaking with these pseudo-intellectuals.

Many other people possess a large vocabulary but use it sparingly, preferring to speak and write in plain English. As more than one writing instructor has put it, “Your goal is to express, not to impress.”

It’s possible that The Words You Should Know to Sound Smart may even put some money in your pocket. People who have a good vocabulary come off as confident, intelligent, and motivated—qualities necessary for financial success. The late motivational speaker Earl Nightingale liked to tell students about a twenty-year study of college graduates. The study concluded, “Without a single exception, those who had scored highest on the vocabulary test given in college were in the top income group, while those who had scored the lowest were in the bottom income group.”

Scientist John O’Connor gave vocabulary tests to executive and supervisory personnel in thirty-nine large manufacturing companies. On average, test scores for the company presidents were nearly three times higher than their shop foremen. Vocabulary researchers Richard C. Anderson and W. E. Nagy write, “One of the most consistent findings of educational research is that having a small vocabulary portends poor school performance and, conversely, having a large vocabulary is associated with school success.”

Whether this book helps you get higher grades or advance in your career, it’s fun to improve your command of the English language—either to impress or express. Some of the words in The Words You Should Know to Sound Smart can do just that: make you sound educated and intelligent. But you may get pleasure out of knowing them and adding them to your vocabulary quiver, even if you keep most of them in reserve. It’s your call.

A Note on the Pronunciation

Pronunciation keys given in this book are rendered phonetically, without using special symbols or systems.

Many of the words in this book have meanings and pronunciations—in addition to those listed here—that are entirely correct.

Regional influences can affect pronunciation of certain words. In this book, we use the most commonly accepted pronunciation for each word, recognizing that it is by no means the only acceptable pronunciation.

A Note on the Sources

In his book The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary, Simon Winchester observes that there are essentially three sources for the words in any dictionary: (1) words found in existing dictionaries; (2) words overheard in conversation; and (3) words found “by a concerted trawl through the text of literature.” The Words You Should Know to Sound Smart is my attempt at a listing of all three sources.

“Of course the illusion of art is to make one believe that great literature is very close to life, but exactly the opposite is true. Life is AMORPHOUS, literature is formal.”

Françoise Sagan, French novelist and playwright

A

abatement (ah-BAIT-ment), noun

The reduction or elimination of a tax, claim, fine, or debt.

By having her daddy pull strings in the mayor's office, Sylvia received a quick ABATEMENT of her traffic ticket.

abjure (ab-JOOR), transitive verb

To renounce or turn your back on a belief or position you once held near and dear.

Once Jodi tasted my mouth-watering, medium-rare filet mignon, she ABJURED the vegetarian lifestyle forever.

abominate (uh-BOM-in-ate), verb

When you abominate something, you really, really hate and dislike it – and view it with considerable loathing.

"For my part, I ABOMINATE all honorable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever." – Herman Melville, American author

abscond (ab-SKOND), verb

To leave in a hurry but quietly, so as to escape notice, especially to avoid trouble.

Bored out of his wits, Jared ABSCONDED with the family Mercedes, but he wrapped it around a large oak tree.

abstemious (ab-STEE-me-us), adjective

To eat plain and simple food in moderation, avoiding over-indulgence in drink and gluttony at the table.

Gandhi led an ABSTEMIOUS life.

abstruse (ab-STROOS), adjective

Arcane, complex, difficult to understand and learn.

Bob began to wish there was, in fact, a Santa Claus because he found the "simple instructions" to his son's bicycle far too ABSTRUSE.

acculturation (ah-kul-cherr-AYE-shin), noun

The process of adapting to a different culture.

Just because sushi makes me queasy, doesn't mean I'm opposed to ACCULTURATION.

acrimonious (ah-kri-MOAN-ee-us), adjective

Angry; bitter; disputed.

> "There is something about the literary life that repels me, all this desperate building of castles on cobwebs, the long-drawn ACRIMONIOUS struggle to make something important which we all know will be gone forever in a few years …" – Raymond Chandler, American author

adjudicate (ah-JOO-dih-kate), verb

To preside over or listen to opposing arguments and help two parties settle their difference and come to an agreement.

As my daughters pummeled each other while screaming at top volume, I tried desperately to ADJUDICATE their quarrel.

ad nauseam (ad-NAW-zee-um), adverb

Something that goes on and on, or is done over and over again, to a ridiculous, even sickening degree.

At first we were all impressed that Steve could recite the entire Gettysburg Address, but we all got kind of sickened when he repeated the feat AD NAUSEAM.

adroit (ah-DROYT), adjective

Skilled or clever in a particular pursuit.

"It's kind of sad," Betty said to Barbara, "that Will thinks his ADROIT opera-singing abilities will impress women."

adulatory (ad-JYOO-lah-tore-ee), adjective

Complimentary; giving of effusive praise.

"He includes in his final chapter a passage of ADULATORY prose from Henry James." – Joyce Carol Oates, American author

aegis (AYE-jis), noun

The protection, support, and help rendered by a guardian, supporter, backer, or mentor.

Jill thinks she's above reproach because she's under the AEGIS of that marketing vice-president with a penchant for younger women.

aesthetic (es-THEH-tik), adjective

Relating to beauty and the appreciation of beauty.

Covering your walls with pictures torn from the newspaper does not constitute a genuine AESTHETIC sense, Harold.

affectation (ah-fek-TAY-shun), noun

Behaviors or mannerisms that are exaggerated, extreme, eccentric, and deliberately showy, often an effort to attract attention.

"AFFECTATION is awkward and forces imitation of what should be genuine and easy." – John Locke, British philosopher

afflatus (uh-FLAY-tuss), noun

Inspiration that seems to come from divine origin.

The Nobel Prize-winning novelist attributed her abilities to AFFLATUS, rather than to her own abilities.

aficionado (uh-fish-ee-uh-NAH-doe), noun

A devotee, someone who is enthralled with and supports a particular activity.

Dwight often refers to himself as an AFICIONADO of American-made microbrews.

aggrandize (ah-GRAND-ize), verb

To exaggerate, put on a false front, and make something look greater and grander than it really is.

Phil tries to AGGRANDIZE his reputation by stating that he is a charter member of the Bill O'Reilly fan club, but everybody just thinks this "feat" makes him pathetic.

akimbo (ah-KIM-bo), adverb

With hands on hips and elbows turned outward.

When my father gets really mad, he stands stock-still, arms AKIMBO, and slowly turns red in the face.

alacrity (ah-LAK-rih-tee), noun

Cheerful cooperation rendered with enthusiasm, promptness, and politeness.

The ALACRITY with which Steve responded to Helen's invitation is nothing short of astonishing.

albeit (al-BEE-it), conjunction

Though.

Vickie thought Charles was dim-witted, ALBEIT cute, in a childlike way.

aleatory (AIL-ee-ah-tore-ee), adjective

An action that is unplanned, spontaneous, or spur of the moment rather than deliberately thought out and carefully considered; an outcome that is anything but certain and depends on luck, randomness, or chance.

"Of course you lost the election!" Miranda yelled. "An ALEATORY, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants campaign is never

going to be a recipe for success!"

allegory (AL-eh-gor-ee), noun

A story told to communicate a hidden meaning or deeper theme.

Many of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales are clear ALLEGORIES of the consequences of children's rotten behavior.

alliteration (ah-lit-ter-AYE-shun), noun

The repetition of similar sounds, especially at the beginnings of words, in written speech or the spoken word.

I'd forgotten how much Alicia likes to use ALLITERATION in her insults, but was quickly reminded when she called me a cruel, callous cretin.

amatory (AM-uh-tore-ee), adjective

Having to do with sexual love.

Pete hasn't stopped sulking since Alice spurned his AMATORY advances at the office Christmas party.

ambiguity (am-bih-GYOO-ih-tee), noun

Uncertainty; lacking clear definition.

Poets who revel in AMBIGUITY are one of the reasons many people hate poetry.

ameliorate (ah-MEAL-your-ate), verb

To correct a deficiency or defect; to make right a wrong; to take actions that make up, at least in part, for negative actions or failure to take action previously.

After you insulted her mother, I don't think even the most expensive piece of jewelry will be enough to AMELIORATE your relationship with Marcia.

amenable (ah-MEE-nah-bull), adjective

One who readily and agreeably gives in to the wishes and desires of others.

Mark considers himself AMENABLE, but the rest of us just think he's a pushover.

amorphous (ah-MORE-fis), adjective

Without definite shape, substance, or form; lacking definition and boundaries.

"Of course the illusion of art is to make one believe that great literature is very close to life, but exactly the opposite is true. Life is AMORPHOUS, literature is formal." – Françoise Sagan, French novelist and playwright

anachronism (ah-NAK-ruh-niz-em), noun

A person, place, thing, or idea whose time is past, and that seems to belong to an earlier age.

His three record players—and the fact that he doesn't even know what an mp3 is—make Jim something of an ANACHRONISM.

analogous (an-AL-a-gus), adjective

Similar or comparable in some respects.

Nikki tried to argue that attending public school in Manhattan was ANALOGOUS to attending the prestigious boarding school in the country, but her argument was weak and her grandmother wasn't buying it.

anathema (ah-NA-theh-MA), noun

Something so distasteful to you, so alien and foreign to your understanding, that you find it sickening and repellant—as if you were allergic to it.

Religious services were an ANATHEMA to Russ, what with him being a dedicated atheist and all.

androcentrism (an-druh-SEN-tri-zum), noun

An outlook that emphasizes a masculine point of view.

"Larry," Joan warned, "that ANDROCENTRISM may be all the rage in the locker room, but you'd better leave it out of our bedroom if you know what's good for you."

androgynous (ann-DRAH-gen-us), adjective

Something or someone who is neuter—sexless; of indeterminate sex; or hermaphrodite (having characteristics of both a male and a female).

The models at fashion week were so ANDROGYNOUS that Katherine couldn't tell if the clothes were designed for men or women.

anfractuous (an-FRACK-chuh-wuss), adjective

Full of windings and intricacies, like a good mystery novel.

The novel's ANFRACTUOUS plot worked on paper, but it became stupefyingly confusing—actually, just plain stupid—onscreen.

animadversion (an-uh-mad-VER-zhun), noun

Very harsh criticism that suggests disapproval of what is being criticized.

My boss's frequent ANIMADVERSIONS have led to high staff turnover.

anomaly (an-AHM-ah-lee), noun

An exception to the norm; something different and unexpected that logically should not exist.

"After a thousand meters of this broken-field walking, Mitsuno came upon an ANOMALY: a patch of sand perhaps ten meters square." – Fred Pohl and Thomas Thomas, American science fiction authors

antecedent (an-tih-SEE-dent), noun

The ancestor of an existing product, idea, etc.

IBM's electronic typewriter with storage was the ANTECEDENT of the modern PC.

antidisestablishmentarianism (ant-eye-dis-es-STAB-lish-men-tarry-an-izm), noun

A movement or protest against an established institution or authority.

No, Walter, bringing your own coffee to Starbuck's is not an example of ANTIDISESTABLISHMENTARIANISM. It's just foolish.

antithesis (an-TIH-thess-iss), noun

The exact opposite; a thing that is completely different from another thing.

He tries so hard to be smooth, but Charles is the ANTITHESIS of cool.

apartheid (ah-PAR-thide), noun

South Africa's government-sanctioned policy of segregation and racial discrimination.

Since APARTHEID ended in 1994, South Africa has elected three native African presidents.

aphorism (AH-for-iz-ihm), noun

A proverb, often-repeated statement, or cliché.

Danny, you say "I'm right. You're wrong." so much that it's become an APHORISM.

apocryphal (ah-POCK-rih-full), adjective

An event, story, legend, or rumor that has been told so often, and so long after the fact, that one has good reason to doubt its authenticity, nor can it be verified through research.

John Henry may have been based on a real man, but in the story he has grown to APOCRYPHAL proportions.

apoplectic (ap-up-PLECK-tic), adjective

An extremely agitated state of rage.

Emily's careless event planning makes me so APOPLECTIC that I just want to step in and plan the luncheon myself.

apostasy (a-PA-stah-see), noun

The act of abandoning, ignoring, or openly flaunting an accepted principle or belief.

"It was his idea of grand APOSTASY to drive to the reform synagogue on the high holidays and park his pink-eye nag among the luxurious, whirl-wired touring cars of the rich." – Saul Bellow, American author

apotheosis (ah-pa-thee-OH-sis), noun

The culmination or highest point.

Winning the Silver Gutter Award at his local bowling alley was the APOTHEOSIS of Wendell's less-than-stellar sports legacy.

appeasement (ah-PEEZ-meant), noun

The act of making others happy by agreeing to their demands.

Charlene realized too late that her policy of APPEASEMENT would not cause Warren to treat her with more respect.

appelation (ah-pull-AYE-shun), noun

A formal name, label, or title.

Even though he has only an honorary degree, he insists on being called by the APPELLATION of "doctor" everywhere he goes.

approbation (ap-ruh-BAY-shun), noun

Official approval or commendation.

"In a virtuous and free state, no rewards can be so pleasing to sensible minds, as those which include the APPROBATION of our fellow citizens. My great pain is, lest my poor endeavours should fall short of the kind expectations of my country." – Thomas Jefferson

apropos (ah-pro-POE), adverb

Appropriate, or at an opportune time.

Charlie began screaming the words "Too late! Too late!" APROPOS of nothing.

arcane (are-CAYNE), adjective

Strange and mysterious; understood by only a few.

Bill's ARCANE knowledge of all Lexus models and their accessories is just a waste of gray matter.

archetype (ARE-ke-type), noun

A prototypical example; a recurrent theme or pattern; an original model that is widely imitated.

Boys never played with dolls until G.I. Joe became the ARCHETYPE of the "action figure."

argosy (are-guh-SEE), noun

A rich, seemingly endless, supply.

The deceased hermit's home turned out to be an ARGOSY of Cuban cigars, Swiss timepieces, and historical erotica.

artifice (ARE-ti-fis), noun

The use of clever strategies and cunning methods to fool or best others and tip an outcome in your favor.

"Every art and ARTIFICE has been practiced and perpetrated to destroy the rights of man." – Robert Ingersoll, American orator

ascetic (uh-SET-ik), noun

A person who deliberately chooses to live a plain and simple life; characterized by lack of material possessions and strong self-discipline in all matters of behavior.

When Steve Jobs started Apple, a magazine profile portrayed him as an ASCETIC, noting that he had no furniture in his apartment.

asperity (a-SPARE-ih-tee), noun
Something hard to endure.
Sorry, I can't handle the ASPERITY of a ballet. Could we watch football instead?

assiduously (ah-SID-you-us-lee), adverb
Diligent and persistent, especially in an effort to help others, achieve a goal, or deliver on one's promises.
David worked ASSIDUOUSLY to complete his first novel, writing for three hours a night after work and dinner.

assuage (ah-SWAYJ), verb
To put someone at ease; to comfort or soothe; to erase doubts and fears.
"But history must not yet tell the tragedies enacted here; let time intervene in some measure to ASSUAGE and lend an azure tint to them." – Henry David Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

asunder (ah-SUN-derr), adjective
A whole that has been split into parts; a union that has been eliminated, leaving the people or things once joined now separate.
His marriage torn ASUNDER, Mike decided to quit his job, move to Tangiers, and become a year-round beach bum.

asynchronous (aye-SINK-crow-nuss), adjective
Acting or functioning with no regularity or discernible time schedule.
Maggie's ASYNCHRONOUS habits drive her friends crazy because they can never make advance plans with her.

augur (AW-ger), verb
To predict or foretell the future.
The three witches of Shakespeare's Macbeth AUGUR the cataclysmic fate of the play's titular character.

auspicious (awe-SPIH-shus), adjective
A good beginning giving rise to the belief that the venture, journey, or activity will end in success.
The blind date did not have an AUSPICIOUS start because Max kept calling his friend's cousin "Mallory" instead of "Mary."

austere (aw-STEER), adjective
Stern; grim and lacking humor or warmth; clean and unornamented; severe or strict in manner.
In the movie Dead Poets Society, Robin Williams clashes with an AUSTERE headmaster at a private boy's school.

autodidact (AW-toe-dih-dakt), noun
A self-educated person.
In the twentieth century, the library was the university of the AUTODIDACT; in the twenty-first century, it is the Internet.

autonomy (aw-THAN-ah-mee), noun
Maintaining independent thought and action; free; self-governing; without dependence on, or under control of, a higher authority.
Herb claims he wants AUTONOMY, but he goes absolutely nuts whenever his boss gives him unstructured assignments.

avant-garde (AH-vant-GARD), noun, adjective
New and experimental; especially referring to art, writing, architecture, and music.
"AVANT-GARDE art jousts with propriety, but takes care never to unseat." – Mason Cooley, American aphorist

avarice (AH-ver-iss), noun
The insatiable desire to have a lot of money, greed.

"What you call AVARICE," Mary said, "I just call getting my share."

aver (uh-VER), verb
To assert the truthfulness of a statement.

> "'Has she no faults, then (Envy says), sir?' / Yes, she has one, I must AVER: / When all the world conspires to praise her, / The woman's deaf, and does not hear." – Alexander Pope, British poet

avuncular (a-VUN-cue-lar), adjective
Kind, genial, benevolent, like an uncle.

Myron's AVUNCULAR personality makes women think of him as a friend, not as a lover.

axiom (AKS-e-um), noun
A truth or fact that is seen as self-evident, leaving no room for question or debate.

Much to the chagrin of his creditors, Max adopted the AXIOM of those who have amassed great wealth: "Pay yourself first."

“A woman moved is like a
fountain troubled. / Muddy,
ill-seeming, thick, BEREFT of
beauty, / And while it is so, none
so dry or thirsty / Will deign to
sip or touch one drop of it.”

William Shakespeare

B

bacchanal (bah-kan-AL), noun

A wild celebration; a party at which the partygoers are loud and out of control, often fueled by excess alcohol consumption.

The initiation ceremony at the fraternity turned into a full-blown BACCHANAL requiring the intervention of the campus police to restore order.

badinage (BAH-dih-nadge), noun

Light, good-natured, even playful banter.

"If you don't care for me, you can move out now. I'm frankly not up to BADINAGE." – Harlan Ellison, American author

bailiwick (BALE-ee-wick), noun

A person's specific area of expertise, experience, skill, knowledge, education, or authority.

Foreign language is not my BAILIWICK, I soon realized after failing out of Hebrew School.

basilisk (BAH-sill-isk), noun

A mythical reptile with a lethal stare or breath.

With poisonous saliva that can kill a man with one bite, the Komodo Dragon is truly a modern-day BASILISK.

bastion (BAS-tee-uhn), noun

An institution, individual, or something else protecting or preserving a particular way of life, society, set of beliefs, or moral code.

Cliff, a Yale BASTION, continuously quibbles with Irene, who graduated summa cum laude from Harvard.

bathos (BAY-thoss), noun

A sudden change in mood from the solemn and serious to a more light-hearted, relaxed, and humorous outlook.

When the clock ticked at midnight on December 31, 1999, and we moved into the new century without the computers shutting down, the grim look and worried faces disappeared, and the IT department was suddenly enveloped in a feeling of BATHOS.

beatitude (bee-AT-it-tood), noun

Being in the highest possible state of happiness, good humor, and contentment.

"Kindness is a virtue neither modern nor urban. One almost unlearns it in a city. Towns have their own BEATITUDE; they are not unfriendly; they offer a vast and solacing anonymity or an equally vast and solacing gregariousness." – Phyllis McGinley, American author and poet

beguiling (bee-GUY-ling), adjective

Charming; bewitching; enchanting.

The BEGUILING charm Monica learned at finishing school more than makes up for her vapid personality.

beleaguer (beh-LEE-gir), verb

To persistently surround, harass, or pester until you get what you want.

To the embarrassment of her friends, Kristen BELEAGUERED the sommelier until he brought her a satisfactory Bordeaux.

belie (bee-LYE), verb

To contradict or misrepresent.

Luther's mild-mannered, almost sickly appearance BELIED his physical conditioning and surprising strength.

belles lettres (BELL-LET-truh), noun

Novels, short stories, poems, and other writings read for their grace and literary style and not necessarily their content.

"Learning has been as great a Loser by being … secluded from the World and good Company. By that Means, every Thing of what we call BELLES LETTRES became totally barbarous, being cultivated by Men without any Taste of Life or Manners." – David Hume, Scottish philosopher

bellicose (BELL-ih-kose), adjective
Belligerent, surly, ready to argue or fight at the slightest provocation.
Doug is so touchy about his new Jaguar that he'll instantly grow BELLICOSE if you so much as brush against it.

bellwether (BELL-weather), noun
A leading indicator or factor in determining a course of action or outcome.
The fact that Robert got thrown out of Groton and Exeter was a BELLWETHER for his lackadaisical years at Dartmouth.

beneficent (be-NE-fih-sent), adjective
Kindly in action, purpose, or speech.
In a BENEFICENT gesture, the neighborhood raised $10,000 to help pay for the young boy's leukemia treatments.

benighted (bee-NYE-ted), adjective
To be lost, ignorant, or unenlightened.
The Medieval period was a BENIGHTED era of superstition.

benign (beh-NINE), adjective
Kindly, gentle, generous of spirit, not harmful.
We thought Amanda BENIGN until she began to inflate her family pedigree.

bereaved (beh-REEVD), adjective
To be in a state of grief as the result of the death of someone you love or care deeply about.

"Laughter would be BEREAVED if snobbery died." – Peter Ustinov, British writer and dramatist

bereft (Beh-REFT), adjective
Lacking a certain characteristic, possession, or trait; isolated and lonely.
"A woman moved is like a fountain troubled. / Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, BEREFT of beauty, / And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty / Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it." – William Shakespeare

besotted (bih-SOTT-ed), adjective
Made foolish, stupid, or dull due to an infatuation with love, money, the pursuit of power, etc.
Aline thinks Jake is BESOTTED with her, but he's really BESOTTED with her father's stock portfolio.

bespoke (bih-SPOHK), adjective
Clothes, shoes, and other goods custom-made for a particular client.
Taylor's big secret is that though he wears BESPOKE clothing, he's only leasing his new Lexus.

bête noire (Bett-NWAR), noun
A thing for which one has an intense dislike or great fear; a dreaded enemy or foe.
Sunlight was Dracula's greatest BÊTE NOIRE.

betoken (bee-TOE-ken), verb

To serve as a warning.

For Mary and Paul, the breakdown of their new Porsche while they were still two hours away from their summer home BETOKENED a disastrous vacation.

bibelot (BIB-low), noun

A small object of beauty or rarity.

The Rossington's collection of BIBELOTS contains numerous Faberge eggs.

bibliomania (bib-lee-oh-MAY-nee-uh), noun

A preoccupation with the acquisition and ownership of books.

Lauren's BIBLIOMANIA extends only to her stockpile of catalogues for exclusive shops.

bibulous (BIB-yuh-luss), adjective

Related to drinking or to drunkenness.

Arthur thinks he's "fine," but his BIBULOUS activities are causing the club to consider permanent expulsion.

bicameral (by-KAM-er-el), adjective

A government or parliament with two chambers or houses.

With a Senate and a House of Representatives, the United States has a BICAMERAL legislature.

bifurcate (BYE-fur-kate), verb

To divide something into two branches or forks.

"François Truffaut defined a great movie as a perfect blend of truth and spectacle. Now it's become BIFURCATED. Studio films are all spectacle and no truth, and independent films are all truth and no spectacle." – Howard Franklin, American screenwriter and director

bilateral (by-LAT-ur-ul), adjective

Touching, existing on, or having or being agreed to by two sides.

The president signed a BILATERAL disarmament agreement with the nation bordering to the north.

bildungsroman (BILL-dungs-roh-man), noun

A coming-of-age novel, such as The Catcher in the Rye or A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

Alex has started writing a BILDUNGSROMAN about his experiences in prep school.

bilious (BILL-yuss), adjective

Having a nasty temperament or disagreeable disposition; to be "full of bile" and hatred.

The polo team's BILIOUS captain made his team miserable as he proceeded to criticize their every move.

billet (BILL-uht), noun

A job, position, or appointment.

With his wealthy father's influence, Miles was able to secure a lucrative BILLET in a major brokerage house.

blandishments (BLAN-dish-ments), noun

Compliments rendered primarily to influence and gain favor with the person you are praising.

The BLANDISHMENTS heaped upon the consultant by his client were not sufficient to persuade him to take a staff position with them.

blazon (BLAY-zuhn), noun or verb

A coat of arms; or, to proclaim something widely.

You'll find the Rutherford's family BLAZON on every one of Prescott's ties.

bloviate (BLOH-vee-ayt), verb

To speak pompously and at length

Maxwell BLOVIATES about his “excellent” golf game, but everyone knows he inflates his handicap exponentially.

bona fide (BO-nah-fyed), adjective

Legitimate, the real thing, the genuine article.

He may not come across as particularly intelligent, but Brian’s Phi Beta Kappa key is, in fact, BONA FIDE.

bonhomie (bon-uh-MEE), noun

A good-natured, genial manner.

Even though he has no family pedigree, Walker is accepted into our group because of his contagious BONHOMIE.

bourgeois (boor-ZHWAH), adjective

Pertaining or relating to the middle class, as opposed to the upper class or royalty on one end and the peasants or common laborers on the other.

“The representation of the garrison thus turned out to be incomparably more moderate and BOURGEOIS than the soldier masses.” – Leon Trotsky, Bolshevik revolutionary and Marxist theorist

bovine (BO-vyne), adjective

Anything related to or reminiscent of cows or other dull, docile, slow-moving, grazing mammals.

> “The cow is of the BOVINE ilk; One end is moo, the other, milk.” – Ogden Nash, American poet

bowdlerize (BOWED-ler-eyes), verb

To remove obscenity, violence, and other inappropriate content from a novel, play, or story so as to make it appropriate for a younger reader.

Hollywood BOWDLERIZED his script so, instead of being R-rated, the film was rated PG-13.

braggadocio (brag-uh-DOH-see-oh), noun

Empty boasting or bragging.

Eric claims he is a consummate wine connoisseur, but it is just BRAGGADOCIO.

breviary (BREE-vee-air-ee), noun

A brief summary or abridgement.

She called it a BREVIARY, but Lana’s recounting of her family’s month on the Riviera was anything but short.

Brobdingnagian (brahb-ding-NAG-ian), adjective

Describes a thing or person of enormous size; huge.

Andre the Giant was a man of BROBDINGNAGIAN proportions, standing seven-foot-five-inches and weighing over 500 pounds.

brouhaha (BREW-ha-ha), noun

A confusing, exciting, and turmoil-rife event.

Madeline caused a BROUHAHA when she told her parents she was eschewing Harvard for a state school in order to be closer to her boyfriend.

bromide (BRO-mide), noun

A cliché or tired saying used to express an idea without any thought or originality.

Helen’s Harvard education does not stop her from peppering her speech with insipid BROMIDES.

brummagem (BRUHM-uh-juhm), noun or adjective

Describes something that looks great but performs poorly.

“Our press is certainly bankrupt in … reverence for nickel plate and brummagem.” – Mark Twain

bucolic (byoo-KOL-ick), adjective

A peaceful, serene, rural object, place, or environment.

We bought a weekend place in a BUCOLIC little village in the country.

bugaboo (BUHG-uh-boo), noun

Something that causes fear and worry, often needlessly.

Angela caused a BUGABOO when she informed her family that she was leaving the Episcopal Church.

bulwark (bull-WARK), noun

A defensive, protective barrier, wall, or force.

> "Since he aims at great souls, he cannot miss. But if someone should slander me in this way, no one would believe him. For envy goes against the powerful. Yet slight men, apart from the great, are but a weak BULWARK." – Sophocles, Greek tragedian

bumptious (BUMP-shuss), adjective

Loud and assertive in a crude way.

The club's golf pro was fired due to his BUMPTIOUS behavior on the links.

burgeon (BURR-jin), verb

To sprout, to grow; to blossom and flourish.

Natalia does her part for the BURGEONING "green" movement by having her gardener turn manure from her stables into fertilizer.

byzantine (biz-ann-TEEN), adjective

A convoluted plan; a scheme that is overly complicated; a puzzle or task that's difficult to figure out because of its complexity.

We found it impossible to follow the BYZANTINE plot of how Eileen made Mariah a laughingstock by replacing her Prada shoes with nearly identical knockoffs.

“We romped until the pans /
Slid from the kitchen shelf; / My
mother’s COUNTENANCE /
Could not unfrown itself.”

Theodore Roethke, American poet

C

cabal (kah-BAHL), noun

An underground society, secret religious sect, or other private group assembled for purposes hidden from those around them.

I was shocked when our neighbor asked us to join a CABAL of devil worshippers; after all, he is a deacon at the local church!

cabotage (KAB-uh-tij), noun

The right of a country to control all air traffic flying in its skies.

After 9/11, CABOTAGE became a major concern of New York City and its mayor.

cache (KASH), noun

Something hidden or stored.

Everyone was jealous when they learned of Moira's CACHE of acceptances to the finest schools.

caducous (kuh-DOO-kuss), adjective

Transitory; short-lived; perishable.

"Some thing, which I fancied was a part of me, falls off from me and leaves no scar. It was CADUCOUS." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

calumny (KAL-um-nee), noun

The act of libel or slander; to besmirch a person's reputation by spreading false statements and rumors.

"CALUMNY will sear virtue itself." –William Shakespeare

cannonade (CAN-non-ayd), noun

A continuous, relentless bombardment or effort.

A CANNONADE of questioning greeted Eva's statement that she was quitting the club's tennis team.

capacious (kuh-PAY-shus), adjective

A huge open space; roomy; a large interior or room.

All of our meetings take place in the golf club's CAPACIOUS private auditorium.

capitulation (kah-pih-chew-LAY-shun), noun

The act of surrendering or giving up.

Ross offered James no CAPITULATION during the confrontational lacrosse game.

capricious (kah-PREE-shus), adjective

Prone to quickly change one's mind, decision, or course of action at the drop of a hat or on impulse.

"I do not understand the CAPRICIOUS lewdness of the sleeping mind." – John Cheever, American novelist

captious (KAP-shuss), adjective

A person who enjoys giving unsolicited advice; a nitpicker; a petty individual who takes pleasure in pointing out the flaws in and mistakes made by others, no matter how small.

Audrey is a CAPTIOUS individual eager to show others how smart she is, often by belittling them.

carouse (kuh-ROWZ), verb

To engage in boisterous social activity.

We CAROUSED until dawn at the annual New Year's Eve party that the Weatherton's hold on their yacht.

castigate (KAS-tuh-gate), verb

To scold or criticize harshly, with the objective of assigning blame and motivating the other person to correct their error.

The bartender was CASTIGATED by his boss for serving alcohol to two teenage girls without checking their ID first.

catharsis (kah-THAR-sis), noun

The purging of the senses through tragic drama or through music; or, in general, a discharge of negative emotions.

After losing matches at the club's courts, Puccini's Madama Butterfly always leads Celeste to CATHARSIS.

caveat (KAV-ee-ott), noun

A precaution or warning.

Before Arthur applied to college, his sister offered him a CAVEAT: "Many of us do not consider Columbia to be a true Ivy League school."

chimera (kih-MER-ah), noun

An object, place, event, or combination of things so strange, odd, and improbable that it logically should not exist in the real world—and yet, it does.

"What a CHIMERA then is humankind. What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos!" – Blaise Pascal, French philosopher

chivalry (SHIV-ul-ree), noun

Brave, kind, courteous, or gentlemanly behavior.

"We hear much of CHIVALRY of men towards women; but … it vanishes like dew before the summer sun when one of us comes into competition with the manly sex." – Martha Coston, American author

cholers (KOH-lers), noun

The mood of anger, irritability, grumpiness, or being short-tempered and impatient.

When Franklin is in the grip of CHOLERS, even his closest friends avoid his table at the club.

circuitous (sir-CUE-uh-tuss), adjective

Extremely twisty and winding; indirect.

Blanche called it a shortcut, but her CIRCUITOUS directions caused us to arrive very late at the debutante ball.

circumlocution (sir-kum-low-CUE-shun), noun

Language that is pompous, overly formal, wordy, and redundant.

Grant used CIRCUMLOCUTION to suggest that he attended a prep school, but all of us know he is a product of public education.

circumspect (SIR-kum-spekt), adjective

Prudent, cautious, and well considered.

"I smiled, / I waited, / I was CIRCUMSPECT; / O never, never, never write that I / missed life or loving." – Hilda Doolittle, American poet and memoirist

clandestine (klan-DES-tyne), adjective

Refers to activities that are secret, covert, and perhaps not fully authorized or sanctioned.

"Clandestine steps upon imagined stairs / Climb through the night, because his cuckoos call." – Wallace Stevens, American poet

clarion (KLAR-ee-uhn), adjective

Clear and shrill, like sound.

On the day classes began at his prep school, Paul groaned at the CLARION call of his morning alarm.

cloying (KLOYE-ing), adjective

Sickeningly sweet, sappy, or sentimental.

"Minerva save us from the cloying syrup of coercive compassion!" – Camille Paglia, American author, feminist, and social critic

codify (KAHD-uh-fye), verb

To organize into a system of rules, codes, or principles; to make clear and coherent.

Fiona set out to CODIFY the rules associated with her exclusive clique.

cogent (KOH-gent), adjective

A case or argument presented in a reasoned, well-thought-out, logical, compelling, and persuasive manner.

Corey offered a very COGENT argument in favor of insider trading.

cognizant (KOG-nih-sint), adjective

Aware of the realities of a situation.

Amanda is always COGNIZANT of her acquaintances' pedigrees.

cognoscente (kon-yuh-SHEN-tee), noun

Person with superior knowledge or understanding of a particular field.

As a result of my many years living in the Bordeaux region of France, I am very much a COGNOSCENTE of wine and winemaking.

colloquial (kah-LOW-kwee-ul), adjective

Informal, conversational, everyday language.

"COLLOQUIAL poetry is to the real art as the barber's wax dummy is to sculpture." – Ezra Pound, American expatriate poet

commodious (kah-MOW-dee-us), adjective

Very spacious.

Though COMMODIOUS, the Barrows' Cape Cod home is austere and lacks charm.

compendious (kuhm-PEN-dee-us), adjective

Concise, succinct; to the point.

Sheila is unable to tell COMPENDIOUS stories about her trips to the Riviera.

complaisant (kuhm-PLAY-zuhnt), adjective

Agreeable and eager to please.

Eleanor is far too COMPLAISANT with common strangers.

comport (kum-PORT), verb

To conduct oneself; to behave in a particular way.

Roger always embarrasses us because he seems to think his family name frees him to COMPORT himself foolishly.

compunction (kuhm-PUHNGK-shun), noun

Anxiety caused by regret for doing another harm.

Thomas never feels COMPUNCTION for the bruises he leaves on the lacrosse field.

compurgation (kom-purr-GAY-shun), noun

A practice by which an accused person can be found not guilty if twelve or more people take an oath testifying to the validity of his claim of innocence.

The Anglo-Saxon process of COMPURGATION is the basis of the modern American jury system.

conciliatory (kon-SILL-ee-ah-tore-ee), adjective

Actions or words meant to settle a dispute or resolve a conflict in a manner that leaves no hard feelings on either side.

"If you are not very clever, you should be CONCILIATORY." – Benjamin Disraeli, British statesmen and literary figure

concomitant (KON-koh-mit-ant), noun

Something that exists or occurs with something else.

"Each action of the actor on the stage should be the visible CONCOMITANT of his thoughts." – Sarah Bernhardt, nineteenth-century French actress and author

concupiscence (kon-KYOO-pih-suhns), noun

Unbridled lust in the extreme—horniness.

"You're talking to a young vampire, a fountain of CONCUPISCENCE." – Mario Acevedo, American fantasy author

confabulate (kuhn-FAB-yuh-late), verb

To chat or converse informally.

Jarod proceeded to CONFABULATE about the wines most recently added to the family cellar.

consecrate (KON-seh-krayt), verb

To declare something sacred, true, sacrosanct, or involuble.

"It is regarded as normal to CONSECRATE virginity in general and to lust for its destruction in particular." – Karl Kraus, Austrian writer

consummate (KON-suh-mitt), adjective

Complete or perfect; showing supreme skill.

"[John F. Kennedy is] a new star with a tremendous national appeal, the skill of a CONSUMMATE showman." – Russell Baker, American author

contiguous (kon-TIG-yew-us), adjective

Adjacent; sharing a common border; sitting next to one another in a row or sequence.

The network extends to the forty-eight CONTIGUOUS states.

contretemps (KON-truh-tahn), noun

An inopportune occurrence with embarrassing results.

"Pan had been amongst them …the little god Pan, who presides over social CONTRETEMPS and unsuccessful picnics." – E. M. Forster, English novelist

conundrum (kuh-NUN-drum), noun

A difficult problem or situation that is not easily resolved.

Knowing whether to attend MIT, Yale, or Harvard was quite a CONUNDRUM: MIT had the courses he wanted, but Harvard and Yale offered him full sports scholarships.

convalescence (con-vah-LESS-sense), noun

The time you spend recovering from—and getting back to full health—after an illness, during which the patient usually rests while being taken care of by others.

"CONVALESCENCE is the part that makes the illness worthwhile." – George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

convivial (kuhn-VIV-ee-ull), adjective

Fond of feasting, drinking, and companionship.

"One does not leave a CONVIVIAL party before closing time." – Winston Churchill, British statesman and orator

coquette (ko-KET), noun

A woman who dresses promiscuously or flirts excessively to make men think she is sexually available when in fact she has no intention of sleeping with them.

Marla doesn't intend to play the COQUETTE at society balls, but her alluring looks attract other debutantes' dates constantly.

countenance (KOUN-tn-unts), noun

A facial expression, either deliberate or unconscious, conveying the person's mood, thoughts, or emotions.

"We romped until the pans / Slid from the kitchen shelf; / My mother's COUNTENANCE / Could not unfrown itself." – Theodore Roethke, American poet

coup (koo), noun

When a person already in a position of power forcibly seizes control.

Sophia took control of her father's company while he was in the hospital, an act the investors considered a bit of a COUP.

couture (kuh-TOUR), noun

Clothing in the latest and most popular styles created by in-vogue fashion designers.

If Alyssia does not have the latest COUTURE prior to its debut on Paris runways, she will not deign to consider wearing it.

cull (KULL), verb

To gather, amass, or collect.

Consumer behavior data was CULLED from online surveys and focus groups.

cynosure (SIN-uh-sure), noun

A center of attention or attraction.

"This lighthouse was the CYNOSURE of all eyes." – Henry David Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

“Everything we shut our eyes
to, everything we run away
from, everything we deny,
DENIGRATE or despise, serves
to defeat us in the end.”

Henry Miller, American author
and painter

D

dalliance (DAL-ee-anss), noun

A brief, casual flirtation with or interest in someone or something; the act of tarrying rather than proceeding swiftly and deliberately.

Her DALLIANCE with the pool boy made her husband angry and jealous.

dauntless (DAWNT-liss), adjective

Fearless, intrepid, and bold.

> "For Thought has a pair of DAUNTLESS wings." – Robert Frost, American poet

debauchery (deh-BOW-chair-ee), noun

Frequent indulgence in sensual pleasures.

"The geniuses, the mad dreamers, those who speak of DEBAUCHERY in the spirit, they are the condemned of our times." – Harlan Ellison, American author

debilitate (dih-BILL-uh-tayt), verb

To make weak or feeble.

Several hours on the polo fields are enough to DEBILITATE even the most robust player.

decimate (DESS-ih-mate), verb

To reduce something greatly, to the point of wiping it out.

"Every doctor will allow a colleague to DECIMATE a whole countryside sooner than violate the bond of professional etiquette by giving him away." – George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

déclassé (day-klass-AY), adjective

Of a fallen social position or inferior status.

Jean thought her imitation designer bag looked exactly like the real thing, but the other girls in her exclusive private school quickly ridiculed Jean—and her bag—for being DÉCLASSÉ.

decorous (DEH-kore-us), adjective

Behaving in a manner acceptable to polite society; having good taste and good manners.

"Another week with these DECOROUS drones and I'll jump out the window," the young girl complained to her mother of her fellow debutantes.

de facto (dee-FAK-toe), adjective

Existing in fact.

Although we eschew titles, Sasha clearly is the DE FACTO head of our arts-patronage club.

deflation (dee-FLAY-shun), noun

A weakened economy in which prices fall because of a decline in consumer spending.

We were pleased to learn that DEFLATION has not harmed sales at Wempe's on Fifth Avenue, our favorite purveyor of watches.

defunct (dih-FUNKT), adjective

An institution, object, etc., that has ceased to exist.

"Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some DEFUNCT economist." – John Maynard Keynes, British economist

deification (DEE-if-ih-kay-shin), noun

The process of making someone or something into—and worshipping them as—a god.

> "Poetry is the DEIFICATION of reality." – Edith Sitwell, British poet

deleterious (dell-ih-TEAR-ee-us), adjective
Harmful; damaging.
Smoking has been proven to have a DELETERIOUS effect on one's health.

delineate (dih-LINN-ee-ate), verb
To use words to outline or describe with precision an object or person.
With efficiency, Prescott DELINEATED plans for the new wing of his family's Connecticut beach house.

demagogue (DEM-ah-gog), noun
A politician who owes his popularity largely to pandering to popular opinion and catering to the wishes of his constituency.
"A DEMAGOGUE is a person with whom we disagree as to which gang should mismanage the country." – Don Marquis, American journalist and humorist

demiurge (DEM-ee-urj), noun
A powerful creative force or a creative personality.
After trying a few different professions, Jackson realized that his ability with artifice, combined with his family connections, would make him a marketing DEMIURGE.

demotic (dih-MAH-tik), adjective
Language used by ordinary people.
Eileen always avoids the DEMOTIC because she does not want to be mistaken for someone from the middle class.

demur (di-MURR), verb
To make an objection on the grounds of scruples.
"Assent, and you are sane; / DEMUR,—you're straightway dangerous, / And handled with a chain." – Emily Dickinson, American poet

denigrate (DEN-ih-grayt), adjective
Insulting; put down; demean; belittle.
"Everything we shut our eyes to, everything we run away from, everything we deny, DENIGRATE or despise, serves to defeat us in the end." – Henry Miller, American author and painter

dénouement (day-new-MAH), noun
The conclusion of a complex series of events.
Marjorie was disappointed with the opera because she felt its DÉNOUEMENT left too many loose ends.

deprecate (DEPP-rih-kate), verb
To express severe disapproval of another's actions.

> "Those who profess to favor freedom and yet DEPRECATE agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground." – Frederick Douglass, American abolitionist and orator

de rigueur (duh-rih-GUR), adjective
Conforming to current standards of behavior, fashion, style, and etiquette.

A two-carat diamond engagement ring that cost a young man a year's salary was DE RIGUEUR for proposing to a girl in the 1950s.

derivative (deh-RIV-uh-tiv), adjective

Copied or adapted from others.

"Only at his maximum does an individual surpass all his DERIVATIVE elements, and become purely himself." – D. H. Lawrence, British author

descant (des-KANT), verb

To talk freely and without inhibition.

Eloise is always more than willing to DESCANT concerning her past liaisons.

descry (dih-SCRY), verb

To make a discovery through careful examination.

With barely more than a casual glance, Amanda was able to DESCRY that the handbag was a knockoff.

desideratum (deh-sih-deh-RAH-tum), noun

Something that one covets or desires.

Ever since she was an adolescent, Evangeline's DESIDERATUM has been a first edition of Virginia Woolf's first novel, The Voyage Out.

desultory (dee-SULL-ter-ee), adjective

Acting without plan or purpose; activity that seems random or haphazard.

"Find time still to be learning somewhat good, and give up being DESULTORY." – Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor

deus ex machina (DAY-oos-eks-ma-KEEN-uh), noun

An unexpected and fortunate event solving a problem or saving someone from disaster; a stroke of good luck.

The author used a DEUS EX MACHINA to work his way out of the mess he got the characters in toward the end of the novel.

diaphanous (die-APH-uh-nuss), adjective

Fine and sheer; or, insubstantial and vague.

"To behold the day-break! / The little light fades the immense and DIAPHANOUS shadows, / The air tastes good to my palate." – Walt Whitman, American poet and humanist

diatribe (DIE-uh-tribe), noun

A speech railing against injustice; a vehement denunciation.

The editorial was a mean-spirited DIATRIBE against school vouchers written to prevent children from other towns from being sent by bus to Centerville High School.

dichotomy (die-KOT-uh-me), noun

Division into two parts, especially into two seemingly contradictory parts.

A DICHOTOMY between good and evil is present in every human heart.

didactic (dye-DAK-tik), adjective

Designed, made, or tailored for purposes of education, self-improvement, or ethical betterment.

"The essential function of art is moral … but a passionate, implicit morality, not DIDACTIC." – D. H. Lawrence, British author

diffident (DIFF-ih-dent), adjective

To be uncertain or unsure about a making a decision or taking an action; to lack confidence and boldness.

If you feel DIFFIDENT about driving a Rolls Royce, you can always buy a Bentley.

dilettante (DILL-ih-tont), noun

A person who studies a subject in a casual fashion, learning the topic for the fun of it rather than to apply it to solve real problems.

Joseph Priestly could be considered a DILETTANTE, and yet his work led to the discovery of oxygen.

disabuse (diss-uh-BYOOZ), verb

To free oneself or someone else from an incorrect assumption or belief.

We had to DISABUSE Lorraine from her belief that her family connections would immediately make her a member of our group.

discomfit (diss-KUM-fit), verb

To embarrass someone to the point where they become uncomfortable.

Maggie's public mispronunciation of the designer's name at the charity benefit DISCOMFITED her mother.

discursive (dis-KER-siv), adjective

A manner or style of lecturing in which the speaker jumps back and forth between many topics.

Paul's DISCURSIVE lectures on American history jumped from century to century, yet it all came together in an understandable and fresh fashion.

disenfranchise (dis-en-FRAN-chyz), verb

To deny someone a right or privilege; to make someone feel rejected and apart.

"Some states specify felonies that condemn the citizen to DISENFRANCHISEMENT for life." – Andrew Hacker, American political scientist

dishabille (dis-uh-BEE-uhl), noun

Casual dress, or a casual manner.

Jensen is such a stickler for proper attire he feels he is in a state of DISHABILLE if he leaves the house without an ascot.

disparage (dih-SPAIR-ihj), verb

To bring reproach or discredit upon through one's words or actions.

"Man's constant need to DISPARAGE woman, to humble her, to deny her equal rights, and to belittle her achievements—all are expressions of his innate envy and fear." – Elizabeth Gould Davis, American feminist and author

disparate (dis-PAHR-at), adjective

Describes two or more things that differ greatly from one another and cannot be logically reconciled.

"As if, as if, as if the DISPARATE halves / Of things were waiting in a betrothal known / To none." – Wallace Stevens, American modernist poet

disport (dih-SPOHRT), noun

A diversion or amusement; can also be used as a verb, meaning to amuse oneself.

Felicia has turned the act of arguing with the proprietors of her favorite boutiques into a DISPORT.

disseminate (diss-SEM-in-ate), verb

To distribute something so as to make it available to a large population or area.

The Internet is rapidly replacing newspapers as the primary medium for the DISSEMINATION of news.

dissimulate (diss-IHM-you-late), verb

To hide one's feelings from another by using untruths.

"To know how to DISSIMULATE is the knowledge of kings." – Cardinal Richelieu, French clergyman, noble, and statesman

diurnal (die-URN-al), adjective

Taking place or being active during daylight hours.

The house staff knows not even to approach Nora's bedroom door before twilight because she totally rejects a DIURNAL lifestyle.

dogmatic (DAWG-matt-ick), adjective

A person who adheres rigidly to principles, rules, and beliefs, even when there is ample evidence that doing so may not be the best course of action.

Leroy is DOGMATIC in his assertion that the Maserati Gran Turismo is superior to the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren.

douceur (doo-SIR), noun

A bribe or a conciliatory gift.

After Francine's father refused to buy her another polo pony, he offered her the DOUCEUR of a weekend at an exclusive spa.

doyen/doyenne (doy-EN), noun

A man or woman who is the senior member of a group, based on rank, age, experience, etc.

Though she is the youngest member of our group, Brittany is our DOYENNE, based on her extensive family connections.

Draconian (drah-KONE-ee-an), adjective

Strict; mean-spirited; excessively harsh; cruel; punishment or restriction meant to cause misery to those receiving it.

Ophelia was distraught over the DRACONIAN way that her father forced her to stay with her chaperone throughout their vacation on the Greek Isles.

duffer (DUFF-uhr), noun

An incompetent or ineffectual person.

Maxwell can't help being a DUFFER. After all, his family has only been wealthy for two generations.

dyslogistic (diz-luh-JISS-tick), adjective

Showing disapproval or censure.

We gave Elizabeth DYSLOGISTIC glances when she told us she had decided to stop shopping at Cartier.

“There is no man, however wise,
who has not at some period of his
youth said things, or lived in a
way the consciousness of which is
so unpleasant to him in later life
that he would gladly, if he could,
EXPUNGE it from his memory.”

Marcel Proust, French novelist,
essayist, and critic

E

earmark (EER-mark), verb

To set aside money to be used for a specific purpose.

Milly's earnings from her job were EARMARKED for her son's college tuition.

ebullient (EB-you-lent), adjective

Feeling joy and positive emotions at an extreme level; the state of being wildly enthusiastic about something.

Lorne was EBULLIENT when he found that his mother had given the college enough money to overturn his rejection.

echelon (ESH-uh-lonn), noun

A level of command or authority.

Family connections helped Michael ascend quickly to the upper ECHELON of his brokerage firm.

éclat (ay-KLAH), noun

Great public acclaim; or, great public notoriety.

Although they are the height of Paris fashion, Martina's five-inch heels earned her much ÉCLAT in the society pages.

edacious (ih-DAY-shuss), adjective

Greedy, eager, and consumed with consumption.

It's not fair to label Rosella EDACIOUS because she only wants the same luxury items the rest of us desire.

educe (ee-DYOOCE), verb

To come to a conclusion or solve a problem through reasoning based on thoughtful consideration of the facts.

After Roger's family purchased a Mercedes C class, rather than its usual Mercedes E class, we EDUCED the Wallertons were enduring financial difficulties.

efface (ih-FAYSS), verb

To erase, obliterate, make inconspicuous.

> "It is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to EFFACE one's own personality. Good prose is like a windowpane." – George Orwell, British author

effervescent (ef-ur-VES-ent), adjective

Bubbly; upbeat; cheerful; possessing a positive attitude and joyful personality.

After getting the acceptance letter from Cornell, Sabrina was positively EFFERVESCENT and celebrated with a trip to Neiman Marcus.

effete (eh-FEET), adjective

Decadent and lacking in vigor due to decadence or self-indulgence.

The Eddingtons donated one of their serving sets to charity, so only the truly EFFETE would deign to label the family as snobs.

efficacious (eff-ih-KAY-shuss), adjective

Capable of having a desired effect.

"Example is always more EFFICACIOUS than precept." – Samuel Johnson, British moralist and poet

efflorescent (ef-luh-RES-uhnt), adjective

Describes something that has reached the final stage of its development or is at the peak of perfection.

Thomas is convinced that the Bugati Veyron Fbg represents the EFFLORESCENT automobile.

effrontery (eh-FRON-ter-ee), noun

To have offended someone through inappropriate or aggressive behavior or audacious requests; audacity.

After doing a terrible job on the project, he had the EFFRONTERY to ask me, "Can I do extra credit?"

effulgent (ih-FULL-junt), adjective

Shining brightly; glowing; radiant.

The lightning storm made the evening sky positively EFFULGENT.

effusive (eh-FEW-siv), adjective

Profuse and overflowing, without reservation.

In an effort to butter up the senator, the lobbyist was transparently EFFUSIVE in his praise of the new bill.

egalitarian (ih-gal-uh-TARE-ee-uhn), adjective

To be fair and balanced in the extreme; to act in the belief that all men are created equal and should be treated so.

"Chinks in America's EGALITARIAN armor are not hard to find. Democracy is the fig leaf of elitism." – Florence King, American author

egregious (E-GREE-jus), adjective

A serious mistake or offense, often with dire consequences.

Pauline made the EGREGIOUS mistake of asking the price of a piece of jewelry that caught her eye, rather than simply asking to purchase the necklace.

eidetic (aye-DETT-ick), adjective

Of visual imagery that is nearly photographic in detail.

We were displeased with the Howlands' recent art purchase because the so-called artist harkens back to the tired old school of EIDETIC representation.

eidolon (eye-DOH-luhn), noun

A phantom or apparition; or, the image of an ideal.

> "By a route obscure and lonely, / Haunted by ill angels only, / Where an EIDOLON, named Night, / On a black throne reigns upright." – Edgar Allan Poe, American author and poet

élan, (ey-LAN), noun

Enthusiasm, energy, flair, zest.

Bryanna reacted with ÉLAN when she was tapped to be part of a feature for Elite Travel Magazine.

elegy (EL-eh-gee), noun

A lament for the dead.

"Modern ELEGIES tend to be unconvincing because the poet so clearly believes in the immortality that an ELEGY traditionally claims for its subject." – Edward Mendelson, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Colombia University

elide (ee-LIDE), verb

To leave out a sound or syllable when speaking; to eliminate the distinctive barrier separating levels.

When Catherine ELIDES the "g's" at the end of certain words, she betrays her Southern origins.

elocution (el-oh-CUE-shun), noun

The ability to deliver a public speech in a clear and persuasive manner.

He's a brilliant man, but he needs to work on his ELOCUTION.

elucidate (ee-LOO-sih-date), verb

To lecture, explain, or pontificate about a subject in great detail so as to make it exceeding clear.

"It [was] the mission of the twentieth century to ELUCIDATE the irrational." – Maurice Merleau -Ponty, French philosopher

elucubrate (ih-LOO-kyoo-brait), verb

To produce a written work through lengthy, intensive effort.

Thanks to a few hundred bucks passed along to a classmate, Miles did not have to ELUCUBRATE his term paper and could, instead, attend parties with us.

emend (ih-MEND), verb

To correct or remove faults, as from a text.

Blanche EMENDED her holiday wish list, removing the Ferrari watch and replacing it with a Versace dinner plate.

empressement (ahn-press-MAH), noun

A display of effusive cordiality.

Those at the party who belonged to the nouveau riche set were easy to recognize, due to their constant and distasteful EMPRESSEMENT.

empyreal (em-PEER-ee-uhl), adjective

Elevated and sublime; or, of the sky

The beautiful three-carat sapphire her fiancé gave her shone with an EMPYREAL, almost celestial, light.

encipher (en-SY-fur), verb

To scramble or convert data into a secret code, prior to transmission, thereby making it impossible for unauthorized users to understand or decipher.

Mathematicians were employed by the Army to crack ENCIPHERED messages during the war.

encomium (en-KO-me-um), noun

Effusive praise given in a public forum.

The CEO's ENCOMIUM at Phil's retirement dinner caused his eyes to mist over.

endemic (en-DEM-ik), adjective

A widespread condition or characteristic found in a certain region, area, or group.

Affluence and influence seem to be just ENDEMIC to our group.

enervate (EN-er-vayt), transitive verb

To rob a person, organization, place, or thing of its energy, strength, and vitality.

Greenhouse gases ENERVATE the protective ozone layer surrounding the Earth.

enigmatic (en-ig-MATT-ik), adjective

Mysterious, puzzling, and difficult to figure out.

"The interest in life does not lie in what people do, nor even in their relations to each other, but largely in the power to communicate with a third party, antagonistic, ENIGMATIC, yet perhaps persuadable, which one may call life in general." – Virginia Woolf, British essayist and novelist

enjoin (ehn-JOYN), verb

To direct or order someone to do something.

After purchasing one too many Bentleys, Alex's father ENJOINED him to be more frugal.

enmity (EN-mih-tee), noun

Mutual dislike, animosity, hatred, antagonism, or disagreement between two groups or parties.

Was the ENMITY between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frasier an act, genuine, or a combination of both?

ennui (on-WEE), noun

Apathy and lack of energy caused by boredom and disinterest.

"And he spoke of ENNUI, of jaded appetites, of nights and days aboard a moonstone vessel as large as a city." – Harlan Ellison, American author

ensconce (en-SKONTS), verb

To settle oneself warmly or snugly; or, to hide something in a secure place.

Julia ENSCONSED herself in a leather chair in the family's library and perused recent catalogues.

entropy (EN-troh-pee), noun

The tendency of any system to run down and revert to total chaos.

"Just as the constant increase of ENTROPY is the basic law of the universe, so it is the basic law of life to be ever more highly structured and to struggle against ENTROPY." – Václav Havel, Czech playwright, writer, and politician

enumerate (eh-NOO-muh-rate), verb

To list or to count off individually, one by one.

"One might ENUMERATE the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left." – Henry James, American-born British author

enunciate (ee-NUN-see-ate), verb

To pronounce words carefully and clearly; to speak in a manner that makes you easily understood.

No one will listen to him until he stops mumbling and learns to ENUNCIATE.

envisage (en-VIZ-ij), verb

To envision, imagine, or create a mental picture.

"I don't ENVISAGE collectivism. There is no such animal, it is always individualism." – Gertrude Stein, American author

ephemeral (eh-FEM-er-uhl), adjective

Describes a short-lived condition, temporary event, or fleeting moment.

"There remain some truths too EPHEMERAL to be captured in the cold pages of a court transcript." – Irving Kaufman, Chief Judge, United States Court of Appeals

epicurean (eh-pih-CURE-ee-an), noun

Devoted to the enjoyment of good food and comfort.

Mother's Thanksgiving meal at the Cape Cod compound was an annual EPICUREAN delight.

epigraph (EH-pih-graf), noun

A short quotation or saying at the beginning of a book or book chapter, or a brief inscription on a coin, statue, or building.

"Benfey begins his book with a curious EPIGRAPH from John Ruskin." – Joyce Carol Oates, American author

epiphany (eh-PIH-fan-see), noun

A sudden, unexpected insight that seems to come from nowhere and throws great illumination on a subject previously not well understood.

One day Marcus had an EPIPHANY and realized that, to find true happiness, he should become a philanthropist.

epistolary (eh-PISS-toe-lar-ee), adjective

Having to do with writing or letters or other literary works.

Madeline continues the EPISTOLARY tradition by eschewing e-mail, opting for fine parchment and her great-grandfather's diamond-encrusted quill pen for her correspondence.

eponymous (eh-PON-eh-muss), adjective

To be named after something, such as a child being named after his grandfather or the mythical Romulus giving his name to Rome.

Josephine spends as much time as possible sailing in her EPONYMOUS yacht.

equable (ECK-wuh-bull), adjective

Unvarying, steady, and free from extremes.

"He spake of love, such love as spirits feel / In worlds whose course is EQUABLE and pure." – William Wordsworth, British Romantic poet

equanimity (ee-kwa-NIM-ih-tee), noun

The ability to keep one's cool during times of stress, conflict, or trouble.

When his mother locked her keys in the car, her young son responded with surprising EQUANIMITY.

equivocate (ee-KWIV-uh-kate), verb

To change one's mind or be unable to stick with a decision or resolution; to vacillate in one's opinion or position.

The candidate seemed to EQUIVOCATE on the energy crisis with each speech he made.

ersatz (Er-ZATS), adjective

A phony, a fake, a counterfeit, an inferior copy, a pale imitation of an original.

Before his sentencing and jail term, the artist made an impressive living selling ERSATZ Rembrandt paintings.

erudite (AIR-yoo-dyte), adjective

Sophisticated; well educated; deeply learned; knowledgeable; scholarly.

Beneath his ERUDITE image, Dr. John Brinkley was a money-grubbing con man.

esoteric (es-oh-TER-ik), adjective

Something known or appreciated by an elite few who have the taste, sophistication, and education to understand its merits.

"My ESOTERIC doctrine, is that if you entertain any doubt, it is safest to take the unpopular side in the first instance." – William Lamb Melbourne, British prime minister

ethereal (eh-THEER-ee-uhl), adjective

Light and airy; possessing a heavenly or celestial quality.

"ETHEREAL, their mauve / almost a transparent gray, / their dark veins / bruise-blue." – Denise Levertov, British-born American poet

ethos (EE-thos), noun

The core principles or beliefs of a religion, culture, or community.

Even the eating of cheese violates the ETHOS of the vegan culture.

etiolate (EE-tee-uh-late), verb

To cause something to become weak and appear sickly.

Over time, Brad's excesses—and his refusal to see a plastic surgeon—increasingly ETIOLATED his once-handsome appearance.

euphemism (YOU-feh-miz-im), noun

A synonym that is less offensive than the word it is used to replace.

"The doctor told me I'm big boned," said Chuck defensively. "That's just a EUPHEMISM for fat," his brother said meanly.

euphuism (YOU-few-iz-im), noun

A phrase, sentence, or thought expressed in an ornate, flowery, overly elaborate style of writing, often making the exact meaning difficult to discern.

Felicia's words are full of EUPHUISM, particularly when describing the architecture of her family's various houses.

euphony (YOU-fone-ee), noun

The habit of changing the pronunciation of words or the wording of phrases so they are pleasing to the ear and roll off the tongue with greater ease.

In finishing school, Alsace learned the art of EUPHONY, and she has parlayed that into a hobby of earning roles in television commercials.

eustasy (YEW-stah-see), noun

A change in sea level caused by melting of ice, movement of ocean floors, or major deposits of sediment.

Global warming is already triggering EUSTASY with the melting of the polar ice caps.

evanescent (ev-eh-NESS-ent), adjective

Having the qualities of a mist or vapor, capable of vanishing seemingly into thin air.

"Nobody thinks it's silly to invest two hours' work in two minutes' enjoyment; but if cooking is EVANESCENT, well, so is the ballet." – Julia Child, American cook, author, and television personality

evince (ee-VINCE), verb

To reveal or indicate the presence of a particular feeling or condition.

The blocky lines of Van Gogh's paintings EVINCE a feeling of depression and madness.

exacerbate (egg-ZASS-err-bayt), verb

To take action that makes a situation worse or aggravates it further.

The problem with the mission was further EXACERBATED when the outer tiles ripped away from the space shuttle.

excoriate (eggs-KORE-ee-ate), verb

To criticize; to attempt to censure or punish.

We EXCORIATED Melanie for inviting people with no family connections to her birthday party.

exculpate (EKS-kull-payte), verb

To prove the innocence of someone suspected of being guilty, or free someone from an obligation or burden.

Gerald Ford's pardon EXCULPATED Richard Nixon legally, but history consigned him to the role of a disgraced president forever.

execrate (EGGS-eh-krayt), verb

To loath; to subject to scorn and derision.

We EXECRATED William for weeks due to his casual rejection of an invitation to join Yale's Skull and Bones.

exemplar (eggs-EM-plar), noun

A role model, a shining example of a desired state, status, or behavior.

"The system—the American one, at least—is a vast and noble experiment. It has been polestar and EXAMPLAR for

other nations." – Phyllis McGinley, American poet

exhort (ig-ZORT), verb

To urge or advise earnestly.

"The function of the moralist is not to EXHORT men to be good but to elucidate what the good is." – Walter Lippman, American journalist

exigency (EKS-ih-jen-see), noun

A condition or problem of some urgency, such that when it arises, it requires an immediate effort to alleviate or solve it.

"We should never despair, our Situation before has been unpromising and has changed for the better, so I trust, it will again. If new difficulties arise, we must only put forth New Exertions and proportion our Efforts to the EXIGENCY of the times." – George Washington

existential (eggs-ih-STEN-shul), adjective

Refers to ideas, beliefs, and philosophies that support the belief in free will and the freedom of the individual.

"No phallic hero, no matter what he does to himself or to another to prove his courage, ever matches the solitary, EXISTENTIAL courage of the woman who gives birth." – Andrea Dworkin, American radical feminist and author

expropriate (eks-PRO-pree-ate), verb

To seize property or wealth from its owner for the public's use or benefit, as when the state takes someone's home under eminent domain to build a road through it.

The Bradfords are still reeling from the fact that the state EXPROPRIATED a portion of their formal gardens for a new highway.

expurgate (EKS-per-gate), transitive verb

To purge sexually inappropriate, disgusting, or otherwise undesirable material prior to presentation.

For her parents' benefit, Marina EXPURGATED stories related to the weekend she spent slumming in Greenwich Village.

extemporaneous (eks-tem-POOR-ayne-ee-us), adjective

Off the cuff; done without preparation.

My ability to speak EXTEMPORANEOUSLY makes me very comfortable speaking in front of a group that asks a lot of questions.

extol (eks-TOLE), verb

To praise with great enthusiasm.

Iris has not ceased to EXTOL the virtues of her new Romain Jerome Day & Night Watch.

expunge (eks-PUNJ), verb

To rid oneself of an annoyance; to cast out; to get rid of; to forcibly eject.

"There is no man, however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived in a way the consciousness of which is so unpleasant to him in later life that he would gladly, if he could, EXPUNGE it from his memory." – Marcel Proust, French novelist, essayist, and critic

extrapolate (eks-TRAP-oh-late), verb

To infer, by taking known information into account.

The tasteful four-carat diamond on her finger allowed us to EXTRAPOLATE that Portia had accepted James's proposal.

“Never lose sight of the fact that all human FELICITY lies in man’s imagination, and that he cannot think to attain it unless he heeds all his caprices.”

Marquis de Sade, French aristocrat and revolutionary

F

façade (fah-SAHD), noun
The front of a building; a deceptive appearance masking a thing's true nature.

> "A good man often appears gauche simply because he does not take advantage of the myriad mean little chances of making himself look stylish. Preferring truth to form, he is not constantly at work upon the FAÇADE of his appearance." – Iris Murdoch, Irish writer and philosopher

facetious (fuh-SEE-shus), adjective
Comments made specifically to get a laugh out of those around you; something said in jest; sarcastic.

"Boarding school manners and attitudes—stoic denial, FACETIOUS irony—are still deeply entrenched in the character of the country." – Jonathan Raban, British travel writer and novelist

facile (FASS-ill), adjective
Accomplished easily and with little effort.

> "The hunger for FACILE wisdom is the root of all false philosophy." - George Santayana, Spanish-born American author and philosopher

faction (FAK-shin), noun
A small dissenting group within a larger one.

"I will keep where there is wit stirring, and leave the FACTION of fools." – William Shakespeare

factitious (fack-TISH-uss), adjective
Contrived; fabricated.

At first, we thought the rumor FACTITIOUS, but then we learned that couture-producer Hermes does, in fact, plan to design and market a helicopter.

fallacious (fuh-LAY-shus), adjective
An idea or conclusion based on one or more false assumptions.

Since my online subscriber list is double opt-in, accusing me of being a spammer is a wholly FALLACIOUS assumption.

fallible (FAL-ih-bull), adjective
Capable of screwing up, making errors, or being wrong.

At a fairly young age children realize their parents are eminently FALLIBLE.

farcical (FAR-sih-kuhl), adjective
Ludicrous, absurd, or laughably inept.

"To conjure up such ridiculous questions, the answers to which we all know or should know are in the negative, is to build up a whimsical and FARCICAL straw man which is not only grim but Grimm." – Tom C. Clark, Supreme Court Justice

farouche (fah-ROSH), adjective
To become sullen, shy, or withdrawn in the presence of company.

His FAROUCHE demeanor gave people the impression that he didn't like them, when in fact, he was merely an introvert.

fastidious (fah-STID-ee-us), adjective

To be particular about things, particularly good housekeeping and personal hygiene; to place great importance on even the smallest of details.

> "A FASTIDIOUS person in the throes of love is a rich source of mirth." – Martha Duffy, Arts editor, Time magazine

fatuous (FACH-oo-us), adjective

Trivial, silly, absurd, unimportant, pointless.

"I'm sick of pretending that some FATUOUS male's self-important pronouncements are the objects of my undivided attention." – Germaine Greer, Australian writer and scholar

Faustian (FOW-stee-in), adjective

Evil; malicious; dark and brooding with malevolent intent; demonic; satanic; having sold one's soul to the devil—metaphorically or literally—in exchange for wealth and power.

In the movie The End of Days a group of police officers make a FAUSTIAN bargain with Satan himself.

faux (FOH), adjective

Fake; phony; artificial.

She wore a cheap second-hand dress and a FAUX pearl necklace made out of white beads.

faux pas (FOH pah), noun

A serious breach of social protocol or etiquette.

Looking a Japanese business customer directly in the eye during conversation is considered an egregious FAUX PAS not easily forgiven.

fealty (FEE-ul-tea), noun

A sense of obligation or loyalty, usually existing because one person feels beholden to another.

The only reason that Bryson pledged FEALTY to David is because David's social connections helped Bryson get a job on Wall Street.

feckless (FEK-less), adjective

Possessing an air of casual indifference; lacking definitiveness of purpose.

Some accuse us of being FECKLESS, but they have no idea how difficult it is to live a wealth-infused lifestyle.

fecundity (Fe-KUN-di-tee), noun

A person, organization, resource, or activity that is exceptionally productive, creative, fertile, or fruitful.

"Blistering heat suddenly took the place of Carboniferous moisture and FECUNDITY." – Simon Winchester, British author and journalist

felicitous (fih-LISS-ih-tuss), adjective

Appropriate and well suited for a particular occasion.

"O to be a dragon / a symbol of the power of Heaven—of silkworm / size or immense; at times invisible. FELICITOUS phenomenon!" – Marianne Moore, Modernist American poet and writer

felicity (fih-LISS-ih-tee), noun

A state of blissful happiness.

"Never lose sight of the fact that all human FELICITY lies in man's imagination, and that he cannot think to attain it unless he heeds all his caprices." - Marquis de Sade, French aristocrat and revolutionary

fervent (FUR-vuhnt), adjective

Showing great enthusiasm and intensity of spirit.

Packing up the family's castoffs for myriad charities each December places Contessa in a FERVENT state.

fiat (FEE-aht), noun

An authoritative decree or order.

Everyone interested in receiving a sizeable portion of his inheritance simply allows grandfather to rule the household by FIAT.

filibuster (FILL-in-bus-ter), noun

Making a prolonged speech or using other tactics to delay legislative actions or other important decisions.

The room breathed a collective sigh when the senator finally ended his eight-hour FILIBUSTER.

fillip (FILL-uhp), noun

Something that revives or arouses excitement.

"Faithful horoscope-watching, practiced daily, provides just the sort of small, but warm and infinitely reassuring FILLIP that gets matters off to a spirited start." – Shana Alexander, American author

flagitious (fluh-JISH-uss), adjective

Shamefully wicked or particularly heinous.

Now that the paparazzi hangs on her every move, Natasha goes out of her way to engage in FLAGITIOUS behavior.

flagrante delicto (fluh-grahn-tay di-LIK-toh), noun

In the act of committing an offense; most widely used today to describe a couple caught in the act of sexual intercourse.

"No cheating spouse, no teen with a wrecked family car, no mayor of Washington, DC, videotaped in FLAGRANTE DELICTO has ever come up with anything as farfetched as U.S. farm policy." – P. J. O'Rourke, American satirist

florid (FLOOR-id), adjective

Excessively ornate and showy, as prose.

"All men are really most attracted by the beauty of plain speech, and they even write in a FLORID style in imitation of this." – Henry David Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

foible (FOY-bull), noun

A small flaw, weakness, or defect.

For all his flaws and FOIBLES, Richard Nixon was perhaps the most effective president on foreign policy in the twentieth century.

foment (foe-MEHNT), verb

To rouse or incite.

"If perticuliar care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to FOMENT a Rebelion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation." – Abigail Adams, second First Lady of the United States

forbear (for-BEAR), verb

To not do something; to do without.

The landlord decided to FORBEAR raising the rent until the repairs to the building had been completed.

forestall (for-STAWL), verb

To thwart an action in advance; or, to buy up goods in order to increase their resale price.

Arthur's family thrives during financially insecure times because it always seems to FORESTALL exactly the right commodities.

fortuitous (for-TOO-ih-tuss), adjective

A happy event taking place by accident or chance.

"The most FORTUITOUS event of my entire life was meeting my wife Eleanor." – Franklin Delano Roosevelt

founder (FOUN-der), verb

To fail utterly or to become a complete wreck.

"Who would not rather FOUNDER in the fight / Than not have known the glory of the fray?" – Richard Hovey, American poet

fractious (FRACK-shuss), adjective

Easily angered or irritable; quarrelsome; unruly.

"Sex is metaphysical for men, as it is not for women. Women have no problem to solve through sex. Physically and psychologically, they are serenely self-contained. They may choose to achieve, but they do not need it. They are not thrust into the beyond by their own FRACTIOUS bodies." – Camille Paglia, American author, feminist, and social critic

frangible (FRAN-juh-bull), adjective

Easily breakable.

The Worthington's staff knows to be excessively careful around the families collection of FRANGIBLE Ming vases.

frenetic (fruh-NET-ick), adjective

Frantic and frenzied.

"I love my work with a FRENETIC and perverse love, as an ascetic loves the hair shirt which scratches his belly." – Gustave Flaubert, French writer

frippery (FRIHP-uh-ree), noun

Ostentatious or affected elegance.

The FRIPPERY of Lara's couture belied her nouveau riche origins.

frisson (FREE-son), noun

A sudden strong feeling of excitement, conflict, or danger.

"Pregnant women! They had that weird FRISSON, an aura of magic that combined awkwardly with an earthy sense of duty." – Ruth Morgan, American novelist

fruition (froo-ISH-un), noun

The completion of a task; the achievement of a goal as the result of significant and persistent effort.

John Nash, a mathematician whose life was featured in "A Beautiful Mind," received the Nobel Prize for the FRUITION of his work in game theory decades after he completed it.

fulsome (FULL-sum), adjective

Describes words or actions that praise or flatter someone to an excessive degree.

Katie's introduction of the keynote speaker was so FULSOME that he led his speech with a few self-effacing remarks.

fungible (FUHN-jih-bull), adjective

Freely exchangeable for another of like nature; interchangeable.

Stella was incensed to find that not all Cartier watches are FUNGIBLE.

furtive (FUR-tiv), adjective

Acting guilty of some misstep or possessing knowledge one would just as soon keep secret.

> “For a while the two stared at each other – Denison embarrassed, Selene almost FURTIVE.” – Isaac Asimov, Russian-born American author and biochemist

“Jealousy is a GRIEVOUS passion that jealously seeks what causes grief.”

Franz Grillparzer, Austrian poet

G

gable (GAY-bull), noun

The triangular upper part of a wall at the end of a rigid roof.

The Sandersons could not resist purchasing a second Cape Cod home because they fell in love with the home's colorful GABLES.

gainsay (GANE-say), verb

To deny, dispute, or contradict.

Michael has made no attempt to GAINSAY the persistent rumors that his family's fortune rests solely on insider trading.

galivant (GAL-ih-vant), verb

To wander widely; to constantly travel to many different places, without an itinerary or plan; to freely go wherever and whenever the mood strikes you, and doing so frequently.

Some accuse us of GALIVANTING around the world, but cultural knowledge is de rigueur for cocktail conversation.

galleon (GAL-ee-un), noun

A Mediterranean sailing vessel used by explorers for ocean voyages.

The GALLEONS of the Spanish fleet sailed annually from Seville to Panama and Cartagena.

galvanize (GAL-vuh-nyze), verb

To propel someone or something into sudden activity.

The unveiling of new yachts quickly GALVANIZED the regatta.

gambit (GAM-bit), noun

A remark used to redirect a conversation; or a maneuver used to seek advantage.

"The catchphrase positively rejoices in being a formula, an accepted GAMBIT, a ready-made reaction." – John Gross, British literary critic

gambol (GAM-bowl), verb

To run, skip, or jump about in a playful or joyous fashion.

"We all have these places where shy humiliations GAMBOL on sunny afternoons." – W. H. Auden, Anglo-American poet

gamesome (GAYM-suhm), adjective

Playful and frolicsome.

"[Nature] is GAMESOME and good, / But of mutable mood,— / No dreary repeater now and again, / She will be all things to all men." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

gamine (gah-MEEN), noun

A girl with a boyish demeanor and mischievous nature who is somehow still appealing.

Her GAMINE behavior and looks only made her that much more attractive to teenage boys her age.

gamut (GAM-utt), noun

The full spectrum of possibilities or choices.

The choice of places to eat near the mall ran the GAMUT from chain restaurants to five-star dining.

garnish (GAR-nihsh), verb

A legal procedure for taking a portion of a person's wages, property, and assets to pay his debts.

If you do not pay your taxes within thirty days, the county reserves the right to GARNISH a portion of your wages until the back taxes are paid in full.

garrulity (gah-ROO-lih-tee), noun
The habit of talking way too much.

> "The interview is an intimate conversation between journalist and politician wherein the journalist seeks to take advantage of the GARRULITY of the politician and the politician of the credulity of the journalist" – Emory Klein, American journalist

gauche (GOHSH), adjective
Sorely lacking in the social graces and good manners; crude behavior.

Rhett was under the impression that one needed only money to join the country club. However, his GAUCHE demeanor caused him to be denied membership.

gazetteer(gaz-ih-TEERr), noun
A geographical index or dictionary of places organized by name.

The Rothschilds prefer their pilot simply head for the sun, rather than consult a GAZETTEER prior to short flights.

gelid (JELL-uhd), adjective
extremely cold; icy.

The Vangelder's yacht sluiced easily through the GELID waters of the Cape.

genome (GEE-nome), noun
The collection of chromosomes that makes an individual organism unique from all others except its clone or identical twin.

Blake has become convinced that the GENOMES of those among his most important social contacts have more commonalities than differences.

genteel (jehn-TEEL), adjective
Well-bred and possessing a refined temperament.

> "[I am] a journalist in the field of etiquette. I try to find out what the most GENTEEL people regularly do, what traditions they have
> discarded, what compromises they have made." – Amy Vanderbilt, American etiquette expert

geopolitical (gee-oh-poh-LIH-tih-kull), adjective
Anything having to do with the politics affecting the relationships of two or more countries, especially when influenced by geographical factors.

GEOPOLITICAL instability in the Middle East is fueling rising crude oil prices.

geostationary (GEE-oh-STAY-shin-air-ee), adjective
A satellite in orbit 22,300 miles above the Earth's surface so that the satellite is always directly over the same spot of ground.

Arthur C. Clark was the first to propose that three GEOSTATIONARY satellites orbiting Earth could provide a global communications network effectively covering every location on the planet.

germane (jehr-MANE), adjective
Relevant, pertinent, and fitting.

"Quotes from Mao, Castro, and Che Guevara … are as GERMANE to our highly technological, computerized society as a stagecoach on a jet runway at Kennedy airport." – Saul Alinksy, American activist

germinal (JUHRM-nuhl), adjective

Related to the earliest stage of development.

Roland's foray into art-buying is in its GERMINAL phase.

gestalt (geh-STALT), noun

A unified whole.

"Feminism is an entire world view or GESTALT, not just a laundry list of women's issues." – Charlotte Bunch, American feminist

gesticulate (jes-TIH-cue-late), verb

To use gestures when talking, especially when speaker is eager or excited to get his ideas across.

"Okay, the man in the yellow shirt," the seminar leader said, pointing to an audience member who was GESTICULATING wildly.

gimcrack (JIHM-krack), noun

A showy object of little or no value.

"Haul them off! Hide them! / The heart winces / For junk and GIMCRACK, / for jerrybuilt things." – Richard Wilbur, American poet

glean (GLEEN), verb

To discover or learn slowly and deliberately.

Bentley GLEANED from the drop in Ferrari sales that a looming recession even had some of his social contacts feeling nervous.

globalization (glow-bull-ih-ZAY-shin), noun

The movement toward a true world economy with open and free trading across national borders.

"Proponents of GLOBALIZATION insist that, as trade and investment move across borders, economic efficiencies raise the standards of living on both sides of the exchange." – Arthur Goldwag, American author

globule (GLAHB-yewl), noun

A small globe or ball.

"In yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a GLOBULE of sap ascends." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

Gnosticism (NAH-stih-sih-zim), noun

The religious belief that salvation is attained through secret knowledge rather than through prayer, ritual, faith, divine grace, or good works.

Many of the key principles of Christianity were formed as a direct response to GNOSTICISM.

gorgonize (GORE-guh-nize), verb

To paralyze or mesmerize with one's looks or personality.

Even without her family's wealth and connections, Marla would likely GORGONIZE all the men who enter her orbit.

gormandize (GORE-mun-dize), verb

To eat like a glutton, as if one was starving.

We find GORMANDIZING on even the finest French cuisine to be quite tasteless and, therefore, to be avoided.

gossamer (GAHSS-uh-muhr), adjective

Something delicate, light, and flimsy that will flutter in the slightest breeze.

Fairies flitted among the flowers on GOSSAMER wings.

grandiloquent (grand-EL-oh-kwent), adjective

Having a pompous, overly inflated, hyperbolic, or pretentious way of presenting oneself in speech and mannerism.

The architect waxed GRANDILOQUENT about the visionary design of his new skyscraper.

granular (GRAN-you-ler), adjective

The ability to divide, organize, and search through something at a fine level of detail.

Julian's GRANULAR abilities allow him to extract the absolute best from among even the largest pile of uncut diamonds.

gratuitous (grah-TOO-ih-tuss), adjective

Unnecessary; inappropriately excessive; uncalled for.

"Being accused of making money by selling sex in Hollywood, home of the casting couch and the GRATUITOUS nude scene, is so rich with irony that it's a better subject for a comic novel than a column." – Anna Quindlen, American author and opinion columnist

gravitas (gra-vih-TAS), adjective

Behavior or manner that is dignified and serious, perhaps even a bit stiff, formal, and pompous.

The GRAVITAS with which Lionel viewed the Harvard-Yale football game was quite amusing to many of us.

gregarious (greh-GARE-ee-us), adjective

An extrovert; an outgoing person; one who is friendly and cheerful in nature.

"We are easy to manage, a GREGARIOUS people, / Full of sentiment, clever at mechanics, and we love our luxuries." – Robinson Jeffers, American poet

grievous (GREE-vuhss), adjective

Flagrant and outrageous; or, causing grief and great sorrow.

"Jealousy is a GRIEVOUS passion that jealously seeks what causes grief." – Franz Grillparzer, Austrian poet

grouse (GRAUSS), verb

To complain or grumble about one's situation.

We decided not to return to the restaurant after the maître d' continuously GROUSED about the slovenliness of his wait staff.

guaranty (gar-an-TEE), noun

The taking of responsibility by one person for another person's debts or other financial obligations. Also, the act of giving security.

"The Constitution is the sole source and GUARANTY of national freedom." – Calvin Coolidge

guerrilla (guh-RILL-uh), noun

One who engages in warfare through small acts of harassment and sabotage.

With her keen eye for detail and authenticity, Lorissa has begun to wage a GUERRILLA war against stores that proffer knockoffs as legitimate couture.

guile (GILE), noun

Deceitful cunning; trickery.

"Gaze no more in the bitter glass / The demons, with their subtle GUILE, / Lift up before us when they pass, / Or only gaze a little while." – William Butler Yeats, Irish poet and dramatist

gustatory (GUSS-tuh-tore-ee), adjective

Of the sense of taste.

"Food has it over sex for variety. Hedonistically, GUSTATORY possibilities are much broader than copulatory ones." – Joseph Epstein, American author and critic

gryphon (GRIFF-uhn), noun

A mythical beast with the legs and body of a lion and the claws, head, and wings of an eagle.

"The GRYPHON'S claws were greatly prized, as they were reputed to change color in the presence of poison." – Richard Barber, British historian

guile (GUY-ul), noun

The act of being deliberately deceitful and treacherous, so as to gain advantage at someone else's expense.

I was amazed at the GUILE Richard displayed in going after my biggest account.

gyrating (jye-RAY-ting), adjective

Of a circular or spiral pattern.

When he first appeared on the Ed Sullivan show, Elvis Presley's GYRATING hips during his act caused quite a stir.

“The HAUGHTY sommelier, with his talismanic tasting cup and sometimes irritating self-assurance, is perceived more as the high priest of some arcane rite than as a dining room functionary paid to help you enjoy the evening.”

Frank J. Prial, former New York Times wine columnist

H

habeas corpus (HAY-bee-us-CORE-puss), noun

A written order requiring a prisoner or person under arrest or confinement to be brought before a judge to assess whether the restraint of said person is lawful and proper.

Following the nightclub brawl, Chad and Wendell managed to receive a writ of HABEAS CORPUS only after their father called the authorities and reminded them of his social contacts.

habile (HAB-ill), adjective

Skillful and able; handy.

Our HABILE gardener has helped render our topiary into the shapes of dollar and pound signs.

habitude (HAB-uh-tyood), noun

Customary behavior or customary procedure.

Alistair's HABITUDE is for the servants to awake him just prior to noon.

hagiography (hag-ee-OG-ruh-fee), noun

A biography that idealizes its subject.

The Van Gelders were disappointed with the volume written about their illustrious descendants because the book fell far short of being a HAGIOGRAPHY.

halation (hal-AYE-shun), noun

A blurred image or ring of light caused by the reflection or dispersal of light.

The mysterious white ring he claims is a ghost is merely HALATION caused by the photographer's lighting.

halcyon (HAL-see-on), adjective

Calm, peaceful, carefree, prosperous.

"It was the most HALCYON summer I ever spent." – Rick Bass, American author and environmental activist

hapless (HAP-liss), adjective

Unlucky and unfortunate.

"Exile is the noble and dignified term, while a refugee is more HAPLESS." – Mary McCarthy, American author

harangue (ha-RANG), verb, noun

Verbally accost; yell at; berate.

"But on that hot July day she breaks—HARANGUING strangers in the street." – Oliver Sacks, British neurologist

harbinger (HAR-bin-jer), noun

A forerunner or warning sign of a future event or trend.

The asteroid's shadow blotted out the sun as it speeded on a collision course with Earth, a HARBINGER of impending doom.

harpy (HAR-pee), noun

A greedy and predatory person; or, a scolding and shrewish woman.

"That HARPY Charlotte can't wait to get her claws into Bruce," Nancy observed.

harry (HAR-ee), verb

To torment with constant attacks.

"At middle night great cats with silver claws, / Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls, / Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds / With long white bodies came out of the air / Suddenly, and ran at them and HARRIED them." –William Butler Yeats, Irish poet and dramatist

haughty (HAW-tee), adjective

Snobbish and arrogant.

"The HAUGHTY sommelier, with his talismanic tasting cup and sometimes irritating self-assurance, is perceived more as the high priest of some arcane rite than as a dining room functionary paid to help you enjoy the evening." – Frank J. Prial, former New York Times wine columnist

haute couture (OAT-koo-TOOR), noun

Highly fashionable clothing on the cutting edge of the latest design fads and trends.

"HAUTE COUTURE should be fun, foolish, and almost unwearable." – Christian Lacroix, French fashion designer

haut monde (oh-MAHND), noun

High society.

"The literary wiseacres prognosticate in many languages, as they have throughout so many centuries, setting the stage for new HAUT MONDE in letters and making up the public's mind." – Fannie Hurst, American novelist

hearsay (HEER-say), noun

Information gathered from another that is not part of one's direct knowledge.

"My talk to thee must be how Benedick / Is sick in love with Beatrice. Of this matter / Is little Cupid's crafty arrow made, / That only wounds by HEARSAY." – William Shakespeare

hedonism (HEE-duh-niz-im), noun

The nonstop pursuit of personal pleasure as one's primary goal.

"[Bad] taste supervenes upon good taste as a daring and witty HEDONISM. It makes the man of good taste cheerful, where before he ran the risk of being chronically frustrated." – Susan Sontag, American literary theorist, philosopher, and political activist

hegemony (hih-JEH-muhn-ee), noun

Domination of a region or the entire world by a single nation, or the authority of one individual over an entire group.

Alison should not achieve HEGEMONY over the rest of us merely because her list of social contacts is slightly longer than ours.

hellacious (hel-AYE-shus), adjective

Extremely brutal, violent, and severe.

Madison's foray into the corporate world was so HELLACIOUS that she quickly went back to being supported solely by her trust fund.

herculean (her-kyuh-LEE-uhn), adjective

Of extraordinary power or difficulty. Often capitalized because the word alludes to Hercules.

"We found it a HERCULEAN effort not to chortle at the outlandish clothing of the nouveau riche attendees of our party," said Lillian. "How inappropriate to wear evening attire to an afternoon garden party!"

heretic (HER-eh-tik), noun

A person who boldly, loudly, and publicly defies the conventions of a religion, society, culture, or set of beliefs.

"The HERETIC is always better dead. And mortal eyes cannot distinguish the saint from the HERETIC." – George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

hermetic (her-MET-ick), adjective

Isolated, or unaffected by outside influences.

"Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, HERMETIC." – Samuel Beckett, Irish writer, dramatist, and poet

hiatus (high-AY-tuss), noun

An interruption or break.

Lorelei's coming-out party was a welcome HIATUS in our otherwise uneventful social calendar.

hidebound (HIDE-bound), adjective

Inflexible and holding narrow opinions.

Wallace can be rather HIDEBOUND when pontificating on the virtues of classic Mercedes-Benz models versus the condition of the automobile company at present.

hierarchy (HIGH-uhr-ahr-key), noun

A pecking order or ranking according to status or level of authority.

In the HIERARCHY of the military, a medical doctor, who is assigned the rank of captain but is not a military man, automatically outranks a lieutenant who may have years of battle experience.

histrionics (hiss-tree-AHN-iks), noun

Over-the-top, unnecessarily dramatic behavior.

"Enough with the HISTRIONICS!" his mother scolded, immediately shutting off the flow of tears and silencing his bawling.

hoary (HOAR-ee), adjective

Impressively old; ancient.

"Feminism has tried to dismiss the femme fatale as a misogynist libel, a HOARY cliché. But the femme fatale expresses women's ancient and eternal control of the sexual realm." – Camille Paglia, American author, feminist, and social critic

hoi polloi (HOY-puh-LOY), noun

A pejorative term used to describe the masses or the common people.

"My practice is to ignore the pathetic wishes and desires of the HOI POLLOI," the governor said haughtily.

holarctic (hole-ARK-tik), adjective

Anything relating to the geographical distribution of animals in the Arctic region.

Our so-called Arctic safari was a bust. No one told us that, due to HOLARCTIC conditions, we would find no polar bears near our encampment.

holistic (ho-LISS-tik), adjective

Refers to medical practices that treat the whole person and not just a specific organ, condition, or disease.

Marsha's HOLISTIC approach to healing involves channeling energy through crystals.

homage (HOM-ij), noun

Respect paid and deference shown to a superior or other person one admires, fears, or wishes to emulate or praise.

Gary took black and white photos with a non-digital camera in HOMAGE to Ansel Adams, whose works he greatly admired.

homeopathy (HOME-ee-oh-path-ee), noun

The medical practice of giving patients minerals, metals, herbs, and other bioactive compounds in extremely diluted form.

Most modern scientists believe the effectiveness of HOMEOPATHY in some cases is due mainly to the placebo effect.

homeostatis (ho-me-oh-STAY-sis), noun

A dynamic system in which balance between input and output has been achieved, so no net changes take place.

When HOMEOSTATIS is achieved in a sealed biosphere, the animals and plants can live without outside air, food, or water.

homogenous (ho-mo-JEAN-yus), adjective

Consistent in composition or uniform in structure.

"By the mere act of watching television, a heterogeneous society could engage in a purely HOMOGENEOUS activity." – William J. Donnelly, American media critic

honorific (on-err-IF-ik), adjective

A tribute or reward given in an effort to honor someone as a sign of deep respect.

Lifetime achievement awards aren't for any single work, but an HONORIFIC for long service and a track record of excellence.

hubris (HYOO-briss), noun

To possess pride, arrogance, or conceit not justified by reality.

Those who accuse us of HUBRIS are simply unaware of the efforts our families have made to perfect our bloodlines.

humanism (HEW-man-iz-um), noun

The philosophy or belief that the highest ideals of human existence can be fulfilled without regard to religion or supernatural intervention.

"The four characteristics of HUMANISM are curiosity, a free mind, belief in good taste, and belief in the human race." – E. M. Forster, English novelist

humectant (hue-MEK-tant), noun

A substance that absorbs moisture or retains water.

Sorbitol, a HUMECTANT, is used in the processing of dried fruit.

hygroscopic (high-grow-SKOP-ick), adjective

Capable of absorbing moisture from the air.

Prescription pills are often packed with a container of HYGROSCOPIC material to keep the drugs dry.

hyperbaric (hi-per-BARE-ik), adjective

Related to artificially high atmospheric pressure, used to treat certain diseases.

Divers who ascend to the surface too rapidly may be placed in a HYPERBARIC chamber to prevent the bends.

hyperbole (high-PERR-buh-lee), noun

An over-exaggeration made for effect.

> "The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little HYPERBOLE never hurts." – Donald Trump, American entrepreneur

Hyperborean (high-per-BORE-ee-an), noun

A person or animal who lives at or near the North Pole.

The polar bear, one of the great HYPERBOREANS, is in danger of extinction as the melting of the polar cap makes the ice floes on which they live disappear.

hypercritical (high-purr-KRIT-ih-kuhl), adjective

Excessively or meticulously critical.

"Good writers have two things in common: they would rather be understood than admired, and they do not write for hairsplitting and HYPERCRITICAL readers." – Friedrich Nietzche, German philosopher

hypnopompic (hip-nuh-PAHM-pick), adjective

Having to do with the semiconscious state that precedes wakefulness.

With all of her partying at exclusive clubs, Madison spends most of her life in a HYPNOPOMPIC state.

hypothecation (hi-POTH-ih-KAY-shun), noun

The practice of using property or other assets as the collateral for a loan.

Buying stock on margin is a useful form of HYPOTHECATION that encourages unsophisticated individual investors to buy more stock than they can afford.

hypothesis (high-POTH-uh-sis), noun

A principle derived from limited evidence, seen as sensible based on an analysis of available data, but not proven to the point where it is an accepted theory, rule, or law.

"In order to shake a HYPOTHESIS, it is sometimes not necessary to do anything more than push it as far as it will go." – Denis Diderot, French philosopher

“We are truly INDEFATIGABLE
in providing for the needs of the
body, but we starve the soul.”

Ellen Wood, British playwright

I

iconoclast (eye-KAHN-uh-clast), noun
An individual who is contrarian in thought, rebellious in spirit, oppositional, and who applies himself to battling established institutions, existing governments, religious doctrine, and popular notions and beliefs.
The late George Carlin saw the role of the comic in society as one of ICONOCLAST.

ideologue (EYE-dee-oh-log), noun
A person who rigidly adheres to an ideology with a closed mind regarding other points of view.
"An IDEOLOGUE may be defined as a mad intellectual." – Clifton Fadiman, American critic

ignominious (ig-no-MIN-ee-us), adjective
Marked by failure or humiliation in public.
After his IGNOMINIOUS defeat in the election, Frank never ran for Congress again.

imbroglio (im-BRO-lee-oh), noun
Colloquially referred to as a "sticky situation"—a predicament that is difficult to get out of.
Our inability to decide which New Year's Eve party to attend created an IMBROGLIO that disrupted our social calendar for months.

immure (ih-MYOOR), verb
To confine, imprison, or enclose behind walls.
Whitney remained IMMURED in her room as she pondered the itinerary for her luxury vacation to Italy.

immutable (im-MYOO-tuh-bull), adjective
Unable, or unwilling, to change.
"I don't know what IMMUTABLE differences exist between men and women apart from differences in their genitals." – Naomi Weisstein, American feminist

impalpable (im-PAL-puh-bull), adjective
Difficult to understand easily; or, intangible.

"The soul is so IMPALPABLE, so often useless, and sometimes such a nuisance, that I felt no more emotion on losing it than if, on a stroll, I had mislaid my visiting card." – Charles Baudelaire, French poet, critic, and translator

imparity (ihm-PAR-ih-tee), noun
Inequality or disparity.
There is little, if any, IMPARITY between the chateaubriand offered at the two bistros.

impecunious (im-puh-KYOON-ee-us), adjective
To be poor or broke; to have little or no money.
Alex has been raving about his IMPECUNIOUS state ever since his trust fund was cut from $25,000 to $20,000 per month.

implausible (im-PLAWZ-ih-bull), adjective
Difficult to believe; highly unlikely to be true.
"At first glance, most famous fairy tales seem so IMPLAUSIBLE and irrelevant to contemporary life that their survival is hard to understand." – Alison Lurie, American novelist and academic

implicit (im-PLIH-set), adjective

Something that is understood or implied but not stated directly.

"The vanity of men, a constant insult to women, is also the ground for the IMPLICIT feminine claim of superior sensitivity and morality." – Patricia Meyer Spacks, American literary critic

importunate (ihm-PORE-chuh-nitt), adjective

Urgent and persistent in solicitation, to the point of annoyance.

"Sisters are always drying their hair. / Locked into rooms, alone, / They pose at the mirror, shoulders bare, / Trying this way and that their hair, / Or fly IMPORTUNATE down the stair / To answer the telephone." – Phyllis McGinley, American poet

imprecation (IM-pre-kay-shun), noun

A curse spoken aloud.

Thomas muttered IMPRECATIONS as he circled the airfield, waiting for clearance to land his Airbus 380.

improvidence (im-PRAH-vih-dense), noun

A rash action performed without careful consideration or deliberation.

"This made him think of all the nights … spending his youth with the casual IMPROVIDENCE of a millionaire." – Richard Matheson, American science fiction writer

impugn (ihm-PYOON), verb

To attack as false or wrong.

"I do not IMPUGN the motives of any one opposed to me. It is no pleasure to me to triumph over any one." – Abraham Lincoln

impute (im-PYOOT), verb

To attribute something, to assign responsibility or blame.

"The sin I IMPUTE to each frustrute ghost / Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin, / Though the end in sight was a vice, I say." – Robert Browning, British poet and playwright

incipient (in-SIH-pee-ent), adjective

In the early stages of development; developing but not fully formed.

The chef's INCIPIENT cuisine already surpasses the fare of other, more established, culinary artists.

incommensurable (in-co-MEN-ser-uh-bull), adjective

Two things that cannot be measured or judged by the same standards.

"Two men who perceive the same situation differently but employ the same vocabulary in its discussion speak from INCOMMENSURABLE viewpoints." – Thomas Kuhn, American philosopher

incongruous (in-KAHNG-grew-us), adjective

Describes something that does not belong in its current place, setting, or role; out of place; not fitting in.

"The taste for quotations (and for the juxtaposition of INCONGRUOUS quotations) is a Surrealist taste." – Susan Sontag, American literary theorist, philosopher, and political activist

incontrovertible (in-kahn-trah-VER-tih-bull), adjective

Beyond question or dispute.

"Some minds are as little logical or argumentative as nature; they can offer no reason or "guess," but they exhibit the solemn and INCONTROVERTIBLE fact." – Henry David Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

inculcate (IN-kul-kate), transitive verb

To impress an idea or belief upon someone by repeating it to that person over and over until the idea is firmly

lodged in his brain.

New cult members are quickly INCULCATED with the cult leader's beliefs and world view.

inculpate (in-KOOL-pate), verb

To incriminate, blame, or charge with a crime.

Thanks to our connections, none of us were INCULPATED in the nightclub melee.

indefatigable (in-deh-fah-TEE-gah-bull), adjective

Capable of continuing along one's current course of action without wavering, tiring, or faltering.

"We are truly INDEFATIGABLE in providing for the needs of the body, but we starve the soul." – Ellen Wood, British playwright

indite (in-DITE), verb

To write or compose a literary work.

"But if, both for your love and skill, your name / You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame, / Stella behold, and then begin to INDITE." – Sir Philip Sidney, English courtier, soldier, and poet

ineffable (in-EF-uh-bull), adjective

Something so fantastic, incredible, or difficult-to-grasp it cannot be described in words.

Poet Ezra Pound wrote of "the infinite and INEFFABLE quality of the British empire."

ineluctable (In-el-LUCK-tah-bull), adjective

Unavoidable, inevitable, with a sense of being unfortunate, sad, or even tragic.

Our inability to procure Pratesi linens for our Colorado ski lodge created an INELUCTABLE sadness among the members of our family.

inexorable (in-eks-ZOR-ah-bull), adjective

Inevitable; unavoidable; relentless; persistent; unstoppable.

"I know enough to know that most of the visible signs of aging are the result of the INEXORABLE victory of gravity over tissue." – Isaac Asimov, Russian-born American author and biochemist

inextricably (in-eks-TRIK-uh-blee), adverb

Something that is strongly linked to something else, with the bond between quite difficult to break.

"At its best, [Japanese cooking] is INEXTRICABLY meshed with aesthetics, with religion, with tradition and history." – M. F. K. Fisher, American author

inference (IN-fer-ence), noun

The process of reaching a logical conclusion by examining and analyzing the evidence.

Watson solved cases through INFERENCE, while Sherlock Holmes was seemingly gifted with flashes of brilliant insight.

inimical (ih-NIM-ih-kull), adjective

Something working in opposition to your goal; having a harmful effect, particularly on an enterprise or endeavor.

Clarissa's decorating sense is INIMICAL to producing a successful soiree.

innocuous (ih-NAHK-yew-us), adjective

Not harmful or offensive; innocent, incidental, and hardly noticeable.

"I know those little phrases that seem so INNOCUOUS and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech." – Samuel Beckett, Irish writer, dramatist, and poet

inscrutable (in-SKROO-tuh-bull), adjective

Mysterious and not easy to understand.

"I suppose I now have the reputation of being an INSCRUTABLE dipsomaniac. One woman here originated the

rumour that I am extremely lazy and will never do or finish anything." – James Joyce, Irish author and playwright

insouciant (in-SOO-see-unt), adjective
Acting as if one has not a care in the world; free of worry and angst.
We are never INSOUCIANT about our wealth because we must work at all times to ensure its protection.

insular (INN-suh-ler), adjective
Self-contained and therefore isolated from the world and unaffected by outside influences, usually to one's detriment.
The Pricewaters moved from the family's tradition enclave to a more INSULAR compound further up the coast.

insuperable (in-SOO-per-uh-bull), adjective
Not possible to overcome or surmount.
"Conceit is an INSUPERABLE obstacle to all progress." Ellen Terry, British actress

intelligentsia (in-tell-ih-GENT-see-uh), noun
The class of people who are cultured, educated, intellectual, and interested in art and literature.
"You see these gray hairs? Well, making whoopee with the INTELLIGENTSIA was the way I earned them." – Dorothy Parker, American author and poet

intemperate (in-TEM-prit), adjective
Refers to a person who indulges his own whims and fancies without regard to other people's feelings or inconvenience.
"Certainly it was ordained as a scourge upon the pride of human wisdom, that the wisest of us all, should thus outwit ourselves, and eternally forego our purposes in the INTEMPERATE act of pursuing them." – Laurence Sterne, Irish-born English novelist and Anglican clergyman

interminably (in-TUR-min-uh-blee), adverb
Seemingly without end or going on for an indeterminate period of time.

"The body dies; the body's beauty lives. / So evenings die, in their green going, / A wave, INTERMINABLY flowing." – Wallace Stevens, American Modernist poet

interpolate (in-TER-poh-late), verb
To introduce something—often something unnecessary—between other things or parts.
Dexter could not help but continuously INTERPOLATE unnecessary criticism into the discussion of the latest Parisian designs.

interpose (in-ter-POZ), verb
To aggressively insert your unsolicited opinion, assistance, or presence into a situation where it is not particularly wanted.
"I hope I am not INTERPOSING," Eileen said as she walked in on our meeting—which of course, she was.

intractable (in-TRACK-tuh-bull), adjective
Difficult to control or manage.
"It is precisely here, where the writer fights with the raw, the INTRACTABLE, that poetry is born." – Doris Lessing, British author

intransigent (in-TRANZ-ih-gent), adjective
Stubborn; refusing to consider opinions other than one's own.
"Lamont stared for a moment in frustration but Burt's expression was a clearly INTRANSIGENT one now." – Isaac Asimov, Russian-born American author and biochemist

intrinsic (in-TRIN-zick), adjective

Of, or related to, something's essential nature.

"We are the men of INTRINSIC value, who can strike our fortunes out of ourselves, whose worth is independent of accidents in life, or revolutions in government: we have heads to get money, and hearts to spend it." – George Farquhar, Irish dramatist

inurement (inn-UR-meant), noun

Acceptance without resistance or fighting back of punishment, poor treatment, or unpleasant circumstances or conditions.

"Perhaps others might respond to this treatment with INUREMENT," Eloise hissed, "but I will buy my diamonds at another boutique from this point forward."

invective (inn-VEK-tiv), noun

Criticism or negative observations expressed in the strongest, harshest possible terms.

"The art of INVECTIVE resembles the art of boxing. Very few fights are won with the straight left. It is too obvious, and it can be too easily countered." – Gilbert Highet, Scottish-born American biographer and essayist

inveigle (in-VAY-gull), verb

To convince or persuade someone through trickery, dishonesty, or flattery.

Craig INVEIGLED the dean to allow him to graduate even though he failed to meet the foreign language requirement of the university.

inveterate (in-VET-uh-rett), adjective

A pattern of behavior or habit that never changes.

"Take all the garden spills, / INVETERATE, / prodigal spender / just as summer goes." – Hilda Doolittle, American poet and memoirist

invidious (in-VID-ee-us), adjective

Designed to give offense or to create ill will.

"In the name of all lechers and boozers I most solemnly protest against the INVIDIOUS distinction made to our prejudice." – Aldous Huxley, British author and humanist

inviolate (inn-VY-oh-late), adjective

Without restriction, violation, supervision, or fear of punishment.

"INVIOLATE, he could rupture wires, mangle flaps, destroy the balance of the ship." – Richard Matheson, American science fiction writer

invious (IN-vee-uhs), adjective

Unwalked, and thus, pristine.

The Wallenstones' new compound contains many INVIOUS tracts perfect for hiking or fox hunting.

irascible (ih-RASS-uh-bull), adjective

Easily irritated or annoyed; prone to losing one's temper; quick to anger.

"I have never known anyone worth a damn who wasn't IRASCIBLE." – Ezra Pound, American expatriate poet

iridescent (ear-ih-DES-uhnt), adjective

Showing luminous colors that seem to change depending upon the angle from which they are viewed.

"We passed … broken shells and the IRIDESCENT film of egg splatter reflected under streetlights where a battle had taken place." – Jeffrey Ford, American fantasy author

irremediable (ihr-ree-MEE-dee-uh-bull), adjective

Impossible to cure or remedy.

Sylvia's outdated concept of couture is completely IRREMEDIABLE.

isochronous (EYE-so-krone-us), adjective

Occurring consistently at regular intervals.

The ticking of a clock is ISOCHRONOUS, but the arrival of the elevator at different floors is not.

isolationism (eye-so-LAY-shin-iz-um), noun

A foreign policy in which a country deliberately keeps its relationships and interactions with other nations to a bare minimum, effectively isolating itself from world affairs.

In the early twentieth century, American ISOLATIONISM stopped the U.S. from joining the League of Nations.

iteration (ih-ter-AYE-shun), noun

The process of performing a series of instructions or steps repeatedly; also refers to one repetition of those repeated steps.

"Thou hast damnable ITERATION, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint." – William Shakespeare

“The tradition I cherish is the ideal this country was built upon, the concept of religious pluralism, of a plethora of opinions, of tolerance and not the JIHAD. Religious war, pooh. The war is between those who trust us to think and those who believe we must merely be led.”

Anna Quindlen, American author and opinion columnist

J & K

jactitation (jak-ti-TAY-shun), noun

A false boast, especially one that is harmful to others.

Beatrice tried to impress her classmates by telling them her last name was Kennedy. However, her JACTITATION was discovered and her peers returned to ignoring her.

jaundiced (JAWN-dist), adjective

Demonstrating prejudice, due to envy or resentment.

The Blythingtons' view of our dinner parties is JAUNDICED by the fact that our personal chef is superior to theirs.

jaunt (JAWNT), noun

A short journey taken for pleasure.

Nicole plans to take a JAUNT across the southern tip of Africa next year.

jawbone (JAW-bon), verb

To attempt to get someone to do something through persuasion rather than by force.

No matter how much he JAWBONED, Karl could not get Alison to sell her stock prior to the unveiling of the company's disastrous new line of parvenu fashion.

jejune (jih-JUNE), adjective

Thoughts and actions that are not well thought out or fully formed; a poor performance or inferior work.

Samantha snidely informed Blake that her JEJUNE entertaining efforts might someday grow to maturity.

jeremiad (jer-uh-MY-uhd), noun

A document or speech in which the author bitterly rails against the injustices of society or warns of impending death, destruction, or doom.

The Unabomber's Manifesto was an intelligently written JEREMIAD.

jihad (gee-HOD), noun

Striving toward an important goal; in modern usage, a holy war conducted in the name of Islam.

"The tradition I cherish is the ideal this country was built upon, the concept of religious pluralism, of a plethora of opinions, of tolerance and not the JIHAD. Religious war, pooh. The war is between those who trust us to think and those who believe we must merely be led." – Anna Quindlen, American author and opinion columnist

jingoism (GIN-go-iz-um), noun

Extreme nationalism, backed up by the explicit or implied threat of military force; more broadly, extreme enthusiasm and support for an idea or position without being open to contrary arguments or notions.

We cannot countenance JINGOISM, especially since it has such a negative impact on overseas markets.

jinn (JIN), noun

A mythical creature created from fire long before man inhabited the Earth.

Failing in their rebellion against God, the JINN were banished to the deserts.

jocose (joe-KOSS), adjective

Humorous, playful, and characterized by good humor.

The pony's JOCOSE antics marked it for a career in polo, rather than on the racetrack.

jocund (JOE-kund), adjective

Having a lust for life; possessing a positive attitude and desire to enjoy life to the fullest.

Ron's JOCUND façade shattered when he found himself the victim of identity theft.

journeyman (JUR-nee-man), noun

A person who, although not a top master of his profession, has become extremely competent, through long years of practice, at a particular craft or skill.

> "So this is happiness, / that JOURNEYMAN." – Anne Sexton, American poet and author

juggernaut (JUG-er-nawt), noun

A large, overpowering, destructive force.

Once he begins arguing about the superiority of Maseratis, Jefferson becomes a JUGGERNAUT, capable of deflating anyone else's arguments.

jurisprudence (joor-iss-PROO-dense), noun

The philosophy and methodology behind the practice of law.

The study of JURISPRUDENCE was interminably dull to John; he longed to work with real clients and real court cases.

juvenilia (joo-vuh-NILL-yuh), noun

Early work by a creative artist, typically produced when the artist or writer was young.

Lorna turned toward the stock market and away from poetry after we read her JUVENILIA and laughed uproariously.

juxtaposition (juhk-stuh-puh-ZISH-uhn), noun

The observation of the differences between two items being compared side by side.

> "A manic JUXTAPOSITION turned Hill House into a place of despair." – Shirley Jackson, American author

kabbalism (KAH-bah-liz-um), noun

A Jewish mystical tradition, based on revelation instead of reason, in which mystical feats can be performed by manipulating the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Through meditation, KABBALISM enables practitioners to become one with God.

kaffeeklatsch (CAW-fee-klatch), noun

An informal social gathering, typically including coffee and gossip.

Jeanette is not welcome at our KAFFEEKLATSCH because she refuses to gossip about her social contacts.

kapellmeister (kuh-PELL-my-ster), noun

The director of a choir or orchestra.

Ever since the Prithingtons hired a personal KAPELLMEISTER for their Christmas parties, everyone else has had to follow suit.

kelvin (KEL-vin), noun

A temperature scale in which absolute zero is zero degrees, and there are no negative values.

When we questioned Rachel about her purse, suggesting that it is a knockoff, she gave us a stare cold enough to measure on the KELVIN scale.

kenning (KEN-ing), noun

A metaphorical compound word or phrase, used often in epic poetry.

Cliff's letter to Natasha included such KENNINGS as "pearl-eyed dove" and "crinkly gowned angel." It's no wonder she broke up with him soon after.

kerning (KER-ning), noun
In typography, the amount of spacing between letters in a word or line of type.
If the KERNING is too large or too small, words are difficult to read.

kibosh (kih-BOSH), noun
Something that serves to stop something else.
Father put the KIBOSH on my plans to extend my summer trip to Europe by another three months.

kinesiology (kih-nee-see-OL-uh-jee), noun
The science of muscles and their function, physical movement, and muscular development.
As a body builder, he studied both nutrition and KINESIOLOGY.

kismet (KIHZ-met), noun
Fate or destiny.
Elaine's parvenu background hardly seemed destined to make her part of our group, but KISMET has made her an important social contact.

kitsch (KIHCH), noun
Art, artifacts, or other objects of a cheap or junky nature produced by the popular culture.
His room was filled with KITSCH: lava lamps, Farrah Fawcett and Cheryl Tiegs posters, and plastic models of Frankenstein and Dracula.

knavish (NAY-vish), adjective
Untrustworthy, dishonest, and mischievous.
Despite, or perhaps because of, his KNAVISH behavior, Jonathan is always a success at our society balls.

knell (NELL), noun
The sound of a bell, especially when rung solemnly at a funeral.

> "They are of sick and diseased imaginations who would toll the world's KNELL so soon." – Henry David Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

kowtow (KOW-tow), verb
To give in to someone's every wish; to grovel and behave in a subservient manner.
Amy told Andrew that she was sick and tired of KOWTOWING to his every need.

kraken (KRAH-ken), noun
A gigantic creature, somewhat like the Loch Ness Monster, reputedly sighted off the coast of Norway.
Most of the KRAKEN reported as washed up on beaches were probably giant squid.

Kwanzaa (KWAN-zah), noun
An African holiday observed by many African Americans from December 26 to January 1.
We feel we are doing our part to foster multiculturalism by allowing the stray KWANZAA decoration at our Christmas parties.

kyphosis (ki-FOE-sis), noun
Excessive curvature of the spine suffered by hunchbacks.
After William's father forced him to help out the family gardener, William complained for weeks afterward that the outdoor work gave him KYPHOSIS.

“I fear the popular notion of success stands in direct opposition in all points to the real and wholesome success. One adores public opinion, the other, private opinion; one, fame, the other, desert; one, feats, the other, humility; one, LUCRE, the other, love.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

L

labanotation (la-bah-no-TAY-shun), noun

A nomenclature used to choreograph ballets, modern dance, and other performances so the dancers can follow the steps.

Even with the best-available LABANOTATION, Walker was unable to adequately perform a Viennese waltz at Natasha's coming-out party.

labyrinth (LAH-buh-rinth), noun

A mazelike series of connected tunnels and passages through which it is difficult to find one's way.

He ran, terrified, as the enraged Minotaur chased him throughout the LABYRINTH.

lachrymose (LAH-krih-mose), adjective

Describes someone who cries at the drop of a hat.

She was so LACHRYMOSE, she cried at commercials for long-distance phone companies.

lackadaisical (lack-uh-DAY-zih-kuhl), adjective

Lazy and indolent; lacking determination.

No matter how many times a week her father allows her to go on a spending spree, Millicent is never LACKADAISACAL about her trips to Cartier.

laconic (luh-KON-ik), adjective

Being a person of few words; expressing oneself with an economy of words.

Harold may be LACONIC, but when he does speak, he is certainly worth listening to.

lactation (lak-TAY-shun), noun

The production of milk from the breasts of a mother mammal so her young can feed by sucking on the nipple.

When mother took us to visit the farm on one part of our property, she shielded our young eyes from the LACTATION of the various animals.

laggard (LAG-uhrd), noun or adjective

A person who loiters; sluggish and reacting slowly.

"Reviewers … must normally function as huff-and-puff artists blowing LAGGARD theatergoers stageward." – Walter Kerr, American theater critic

lagniappe (lan-YAP), noun

An unexpected bonus gift or extra benefit; the icing on the cake.

Frederick would have bought the Porsche Panamera, even without the LAGNIAPPE of a free voice-activated navigation system.

laissez faire (lah-zay-FAIR), noun

The belief that government should not interfere in economic affairs, but should instead let the economy take its natural course.

Our family began to place most of its money in hedge funds when we became convinced that the government intended to forego LAISSEZ FAIRE and take a more active part in the nation's financial system.

lambaste (lam-BAST), verb

To berate or criticize harshly, especially in an unkind way.

We LAMBASTED Marla for not visiting Comme des Garçons during her recent weekender to Beijing.

lammergeyer (LAM-er-GEE-er), noun

A large black bird of the vulture family.

"The world is just that LAMMERGEYER, or bearded vulture, in the sky." – Pico Iyer, British-born essayist of Indian

descent

lampoon (LAM-poon), noun or verb

A mean-spirited satire directed at a person or institution; or, the act of submitting someone to a mean-spirited satire.

We LAMPOONED the nouveau riche attendees of our April Fool's Day party simply by dressing in the same overwrought couture favored by parvenus.

languid (LANG-gwid), adjective

Characterized by weakness and fatigue; or, lacking spirit and animation.

> "In doing good, we are generally cold, and LANGUID, and sluggish; and of all things afraid of being too much in the right." – Edmund Burke, Anglo-Irish statesman, orator, and author

lapping (LAH-ping), noun

The practice of falsifying accounting records to conceal a shortage caused by theft or loss, usually by posting a financial transaction to an accounting period other than the one during which it actually took place.

Even after Skyler was indicted, he could not accept that LAPPING was an objectionable practice.

largesse (lar-JESS), noun

The generous bestowal of gifts; or, generosity in general.

"A LARGESS universal, like the sun, / His liberal eye doth give to everyone, / Thawing cold fear." – William Shakespeare

lascivious (luh-SIV-ee-us), adjective

Interested in and eager to engage in sexual activity; sexual in nature.

> "An impersonal and scientific knowledge of the structure of our bodies is the surest safeguard against prurient curiosity and LASCIVIOUS gloating." – Marie Carmichael Stopes, British scientist and birth-control pioneer

lassitude (LAS-ih-tood), noun

Having little energy or motivation; weariness.

> "We know what boredom is: it is a dull / Impatience or a fierce velleity, / A champing wish, stalled by our LASSITUDE, / To make or do." – Richard Wilbur, American poet

latency (LAY-ten-see), noun

A period of dormancy that precedes a period of great growth or action.

We knew that Abigail's focus on extremely liberal causes was merely a LATENCY that would end with her focus solely on charitable giving to the proper charities.

latifundia (lah-ti-FUN-dee-uh), noun

A large estate, plantation, or farm run by wealthy owners and staffed with underpaid or semi-servile workers.

Billings argued that his family's sugar cane plantation in the Caribbean is not a LATIFUNDIA because the factory pays its workers what is considered a living wage for the country.

laudable (LAW-duh-bull), adjective

Commendable; deserving of praise.

Rebecca's decision to tell her mother that she lost the emerald brooch she borrowed without permission was LAUDABLE.

legerdemain (le-juhr-duh-MAYN), noun

Magic tricks; or, generally speaking, trickery and deception.

The Wilkinsons are one of the few of our families whose initial wealth did not come as a result of financial LEGERDEMAIN.

lethargic (luh-THAHR-jihk), adjective

Drowsy and sluggish; lacking vigor.

"Great talents, by the rust of long disuse, / Grow LETHARGIC and shrink from what they were." – Ovid, Roman poet

levant (leh-VANT), noun

The countries on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Ties between Western Europe and the LEVANT were first established during the Crusades.

leverage (LEH-veh-ridge), noun

Possessing an advantage or extra degree of influence in a given situation.

With his family's connections, Eldridge required no LEVERAGE to obtain a sinecure in the financial industry.

leviathan (le-VY-ah-thun), adjective

A gigantic creature, structure, or thing, awe-inspiring in its sheer size.

"Wilson looked out through the window at the LEVIATHAN glitter of the terminal." – Richard Matheson, American science fiction writer

levity (LEHV-ih-tee), noun

Lack of appropriate seriousness; or, inconstant in nature.

"Love, which is the essence of God, is not for LEVITY, but for the total worth of man." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

lexicon (LEK-sih-kahn), noun

The language or vocabulary of a specialized discipline or profession.

"In the LEXICON of lip-smacking, an epicure is fastidious in his choice and enjoyment of food, just a soupçon more expert than a gastronome." – William Safire, American journalist and presidential speechwriter

liaison (lee-ay-ZAWHN), noun

An adulterous relationship; or, a kind of illicit sexual relationship.

LIAISONS are much more common within our group than are stable marriages.

libation (lye-BAY-shun), noun

An alcoholic beverage consumed at social gatherings, parties, and celebrations.

With the LIBATIONS flowing freely, each member of the winning team felt compelled to make a drunken speech.

libertine (LIB-er-teen), noun, adjective

Licentious and free of moral restraint; or, a person so characterized.

"It is easier to make a saint out of a LIBERTINE than out of a prig." – George Santayana, author and philosopher

libration (ly-BRAY-shun), noun

The oscillation of Earth's moon around its axis.

LIBRATIONS are caused by changes in the intensity of Earth's gravitational pull on the moon.

licentious (ly-SEN-shus), adjective

Promiscuous; slutty; someone who is sexually uninhibited and free.

Janine's LICENTIOUS behavior was really a cry for attention, the school psychologist was convinced.

lien (LEAN), noun

A creditor's right to have debts paid out of the debtor's property, if necessary by selling it.

It's sad that we, at times, must place LIENS on our servants' automobiles, but that is why they are the servers and we the "servees."

Lilliputian (lil-ee-PEW-shun), adjective

Small in stature; tiny in comparison to one's peers.

Jules Vern's LILLIPUTIAN appearance made people treat him like a child.

limpid (LIM-pid), adjective

Clear and transparent; free from obscurity.

The Motsingers are fond of saying that they are capable of eschewing all of the most LIMPID tax dodges.

lineage (LIN-ee-ij), noun

Ancestry; your family tree.

We still consider Rachel nouveau riche because her family can only trace its American LINEAGE to the mid-ninteenth century.

liquidity (lih-KWI-dih-tee), noun

The relative ease with which a person can sell an asset.

Despite a firm belief in wealth LIQUIDITY, Dotson continues to buy such depreciable items as yachts and Porsches.

lissome (LISS-um), adjective

Lithe; supple; flexible.

Moira acquired her LISSOME frame from years of swimming in her family's Olympic-sized pool.

litany (LIT-n-ee), noun

A prolonged and boring account.

> "With the supermarket as our temple and the singing commercial as our LITANY, are we likely to fire the world with an irresistible vision of America's exalted purpose and inspiring way of life?" – Adlai Stevenson, American politician

literati (lih-ter-AH-tee), noun

The segment of society comprised of learned or literary men and women.

We attract the LITERATI because of our constantly carefree and exciting exploits.

lithe (LIthE), adjective

Having a body and/or mind that is limber, flexible, and supple.

"The coconut trees, LITHE and graceful, crowd the beach … like a minuet of slender elderly virgins adopting flippant poses." – William Manchester, American historian

litigious (lih-TIJ-us), adjective

Readily inclined to take someone to court; or, very argumentative.

"Our wrangling lawyers … are so LITIGIOUS and busy here on earth, that I think they will plead their clients' causes hereafter,—some of them in hell." – Robert Burton, English scholar and vicar at Oxford University

liturgy (LIH-tur-jee), noun
The performance of a Christian religious service in a church.
During the LITURGY, the singing of the Christmas hymns filled the church with the sound of joy.

livid (LIHV-id), adjective
Enraged or extremely angry.
Jennifer was LIVID when we suggested that her new outfit was three weeks out of date.

locution (low-KEW-shin), noun
A person's manner and style of speaking.
Neil prides himself on his precise LOCUTION, but some of the guys think he sounds rather prissy.

logy (LOW-gee), adjective
Characterized by lethargy and sluggishness.

"To be scared is such a release from all the LOGY weight of procrastination, of dallying and pokiness! You burn into work. It is as though gravity were removed and you walked lightly to the moon like an angel." – Brenda Ueland, American author

loquacious (loh-KWAY-shus), adjective
Verbose; chatty; the habit of talking nonstop.
Amy and Donna are each so LOQUACIOUS, their average phone call lasts ninety minutes.

luciferous (loo-SI-fuh-ruhs), adjective
Providing insight or enlightenment; illuminating.
Blake did not find the Ivy League LUCIFEROUS, so he decided to devote his life to world travel instead.

lucre (LOO-ker), noun
Monetary reward or gain.
"I fear the popular notion of success stands in direct opposition in all points to the real and wholesome success. One adores public opinion, the other, private opinion; one, fame, the other, desert; one, feats, the other, humility; one, LUCRE, the other, love." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

Luddite (LUHD-eyt), noun
A person who refuses to use or embrace modern technology.
We would not stop calling Annabel a LUDDITE until she finally got herself a Vertu cell phone like the rest of us.

lugubrious (loo-GOO-bree-us), adjective
Pessimistic, emotionally downtrodden, spiritually low, sad, or depressed.
Prozac failed to ameliorate the patient's LUGUBRIOUS outlook on life.

lumerpa (loo-MER-pa), noun
A mythological radiant bird from Asia that shines so brightly it absorbs its own shadow.
The presence of numerous Waterford crystal chandeliers made the ballroom shine like a LUMERPA.

luminary (LOO-muh-nair-ee), noun
A person recognized as an inspirational leader in his or her field.
Frederick's father is a LUMINARY in the field of circumventing most income tax.

lumpenproletariat (LUM-pen-pro-lih-tear-ee-ut), noun

Term used by Karl Marx to describe uneducated common people.

It's difficult to pretend to be a member of the LUMPENPROLETARIAT when your car costs more than your next-door neighbor's house.

lustration (luh-STRAY-shun), noun

Purification through symbolic or ceremonial means or remembrances.

After Melanie spent six months working with charities in third-world countries, we put her through LUSTRATION by reintroducing her to our favorite luxury boutiques.

lyceum (LIE-see-um), noun

A school or other place of learning.

> "[Television] should be our LYCEUM, our Chautauqua, our Minsky's, and our Camelot." – E. B. White, American author

“The man who is in the MELEE
knows what blows are being struck
and what blood is being drawn.”

Woodrow Wilson

M

Machiavellian (mack-ee-uh-VEL-ee-uhn), adjective

A somewhat unscrupulous and self-centered individual who is always looking out for his or her own good.

We can hardly be called MACHIAVELLIAN simply because we do what we need to do to hold on to the luxurious lifestyle to which we have become accustomed.

maelstrom (MAIL-struhm), noun

A situation marked by violence, turbulence, and uncertainty.

Many families who lost their fortunes during the MAELSTROM of the 1929 stock market crash are still trying to regain their social status today.

Magna Carta (MAG-nah-KAR-tah), noun

Any constitution that guarantees rights and liberties.

The club's charter is a MAGNA CARTA that will ensure we are able to keep our tennis courts and swimming pools open only to our most significant social contacts.

magnanimous (mag-NAN-ih-mus), adjective

A kind and generous act.

"In a serious struggle there is no worse cruelty than to be MAGNANIMOUS at an inopportune time." – Leon Trotsky, Bolshevik revolutionary and Marxist theorist

magnate (MAG-nayt), noun

A wealthy and prosperous business leader; a tycoon.

Oil MAGNATE T. Boone Pickens is now investing in wind power.

magniloquent (mag-NILL-uh-kwuhnt), adjective

Pompous, bombastic, and boastful.

The nouveau riche try to atone for their lack of polish with MAGNILOQUENT speech, but the result is ludicrous.

magnum (MAG-num), noun

An extra-large wine bottle twice the size of a regular wine bottle; a powerful handgun firing large bullets.

We doubted the taste of the event planner when we saw that the tables were filled with distasteful MAGNUMS of wines of questionable vintage.

malapropism (MAL-ah-prop-ism), noun

Deliberate misuse of a word or mangling of the English language, often done for comic effect.

Since Emily refused to take elocution lessons like the rest of us, her speech is constantly marred by ridiculous MALAPROPISMS.

maleficence (muh-LEF-ih-sense), noun

To act in a way that deliberately causes harm; behavior driven by evil intentions.

Our upstairs maid's various acts of MALEFICENCE finally caused her to be released from our family's employment.

malfeasance (mal-FEE-zinss), noun

Misbehavior; wrongdoing; illegal, unethical, or immoral conduct.

Gavin insists that insider trading is not MALFEASANCE; it's merely making good use of all available information.

malleable (MAL-yah-bull), adjective

Easily molded into different shapes; easily influenced to change one's opinion or actions.

"I did not know that mankind was suffering for want of gold. I have seen a little of it. I know that it is very MALLEABLE, but not so MALLEABLE as wit." – Henry David Thoreau, American author and

transcendentalist

manifest destiny (MAN-ih-fest-DESS-tin-ee), noun

Expansion into foreign lands, justified as being necessary or benevolent.

"It's not greed and ambition that makes wars—it's goodness. Wars are always fought for the best of reasons, for liberation or MANIFEST DESTINY, always against tyranny and always in the best interests of humanity." – James Garner in The Americanization of Emily

marginalize (MAR-jin-ul-eyes), verb

To dismiss something as less important than it actually is.

Francine has too many connections for us to snub her completely, but we have done our best to MARGINALIZE her influence.

marshal (MAR-shul), verb

To gather all the resources at one's disposal to achieve a goal.

Patricia MARSHALED all of her social contacts to try to get a front-row ticket for fashion week.

marsupial (mar-SOUP-ee-uhl), noun

A mammal who carries its young with her after its birth in a pouch on the outside of her body, where the baby continues to develop.

The kangaroo is the best-known MARSUPIAL, but wombats also carry their babies in a pouch.

marzipan (MAR-zih-pan), noun

A sweet confection made of almond paste, sugar, and egg white, used as a filling in candy or as icing for cake.

"American Danish can be doughy, heavy, sticky, tasting of prunes and is usually wrapped in cellophane. Danish Danish is light, crisp, buttery and often tastes of MARZIPAN or raisins; it is seldom wrapped in anything but loving care." – R. W. Apple, Jr., American food critic

masticate (MAS-tih-kate), verb

To chew, especially to chew thoroughly.

The best way to appreciate the gustatory arts is to MASTICATE your personal chef's creations at as relaxed a pace as possible.

maudlin (MAWD-lin), adjective

Foolishly and mawkishly sentimental or emotional.

"It is a MAUDLIN and indecent verity that comes out through the strength of wine." – Joseph Conrad, Polish-born English novelist

maunder (MAWN-dehr), verb

To move, speak, or act in a random, meaningless manner.

Ricardo's speech MAUNDERS so much that you'd never know he was heir to one of Central America's largest fortunes.

maverick (MAH-ver-ik), noun

An unorthodox or unconventional person who does what it takes to get things done.

"The rugged individualist is too often mistaken for the misfit, the MAVERICK, the spoilsport, the sore thumb." – Lewis H. Lapham, former editor of Harper's Magazine

mawkish (MAW-kish), adjective

Nauseating and sickly sentimental.

"I would jump down Etna for any public good—but I hate a MAWKISH popularity." – John Keats, English Romantic poet

mean (MEEN), noun

In arithmetic, the average value of a series of numbers, determined by taking the sum of a series and dividing by the number of items in the series.

The MEAN of the Bakersfields' fortune is nowhere near that of ours, but we tolerate the family anyway because several members are excellent golfers.

meander (MEE-ahn-duhr), verb

To wander aimlessly.

We fired that particular servant because he MEANDERED far too slowly from task to task.

median (MEE-dee-en), noun

In arithmetic, the middle number in a series of numbers arranged in order from smallest to largest.

When philanthropists Brock, Cliff, and Edward were honored at a luncheon, Cliff was called upon to speak second as his donation was the MEDIAN of the three.

melanin (MEL-uh-nin), noun

The pigment that determines the color of one's hair, eyes, and skin.

Tamara is unwilling to accept that, no matter how much time she spends on the sunny beaches of the Mediterranean, she will not achieve her desired tan due to her lack of MELANIN.

melee (MAY-lay), noun

A confused struggle involving many people.

"The man who is in the MELEE knows what blows are being struck and what blood is being drawn." – Woodrow Wilson

meliorism (mel-ee-OR-iz-um), noun

A philosophy of optimism that says the world is gradually improving through divine intervention or human effort—or both.

Thomas Hardy's philosophy was distinctly MELIORIST because he believed ultimately in the goodness of humankind.

mellifluous (meh-LIH-flu-us), adjective

Music, speech, or other sound that is sweet and pleasant to listen to.

The MELLIFLUOUS tones of his voice brought Martin many high-paying gigs for voice-overs.

mendacity (Men-DAH-sit-tee), noun

A tendency toward or habit of being a dishonest person.

"The human condition is composed of unequal parts of courage, friendship, ethics, self-sacrifice, brutality, degeneracy, and MENDACITY." – Harlan Ellison, American author

mendicant (MEN-dih-kant), adjective

A monk who does not own property or, more broadly, anyone who asks for alms and begs to support himself.

"The woman who does her job for society inside the four walls of her home must not be considered by her husband or anyone else an economic 'dependent,' reaching out her hands in MENDICANT fashion for financial help." – Mary Gilson, American economist

mentat (MEN-tat), noun

A human being capable of performing mental tasks with the accuracy and speed of a computer.

Our accountant is a veritable MENTAT! Did you see how fast he determined all of our charitable deductions!

mercurial (mer-KYOOR-ee-uhl), adjective
Volatile, fickle, and erratic.
Men always tolerate Natasha's MERCURIAL nature due to her beauty and her family's great fortune.

meretricious (mer-i-TRISH-us), adjective
Anything done to attract attention in an unseemly or inappropriate fashion.
His favorite brand of beer used MERETRICIOUS ads—TV commercials showing scantily clad young women—to attract more attention.

meridian (mer-ID-ee-en), noun
Any line that runs from north to south on a map or globe.
He sailed his yacht straight along a MERIDIAN to the Arctic Circle.

meritocracy (mer-ih-TOK-ruh-see), noun
Government or leadership by people having great merit, rather than by people with great wealth.
Corporate leadership in a family-owned business is determined by nepotism, not MERITOCRACY.

meritorious (mair-uh-TORE-ee-uhss), adjective
Worthy of praise or reward.

> "Arrogance on the part of the MERITORIOUS is even more offensive to us than the arrogance of those without merit: for merit itself is offensive." – Friedrich Nietzsche, nineteenth-century German philosopher

metachromasis (meh-tah-CROWM-ah-sis), noun
The phenomenon of different substances becoming different colors and shades when stained by the same dye.
An identical cotton blend was used in the entire lot of shirts to avoid METACHROMASIS ruining the color.

metaphor (MEH-tah-for), noun
A sentence or phrase in which a word ordinarily associated with one thing is applied to something else, to indicate that in some way they are similar.
"If we are a METAPHOR of the universe, the human couple is the metaphor par excellence, the point of intersection of all forces and the seed of all forms." – Octavio Paz Lozano, Mexican writer, poet, and diplomat

metaphysics (met-a-FIZ-iks), noun
The study of arguments, thoughts, and principles based primarily on thinking and abstract reasoning rather than hard facts that can be demonstrated through physical evidence.
"During my METAPHYSICS final, I cheated by looking into the soul of the person sitting next to me." – Woody Allen, American film director, writer, and comedian

metastasize (meh-TA-sti-size), verb
The tendency of cancer cells to spread from a tumor throughout the body.
Byron's ugly nature quickly METASTASIZED in our group, as he spread lies and gossip among more and more of our social contacts.

metallism (MEH-tah-liz-um), noun
The belief that money must either be made of precious metal or backed by precious metal held in reserve—usually gold or silver.
Richard Nixon abolished the gold standard for U.S. currency, and METALLISM declined as a result.

mete (MEET), verb
To distribute or allot.

After Elyssia ran up several of her father's platinum cards, he METED out substantial punishment for her by not allowing her to shop at exclusive boutiques for an entire week.

meticulous (meh-TICK-yuh-luhss), adjective

Extremely precise; fussy.

The overly METICULOUS maître d' made us self-conscious and detracted from our enjoyment of the meal.

métier (MAY-tee-yay), noun

One's occupation, profession, field of work, etc.

Since her family started one of Wall Street's most profitable houses, it's only natural that Ellen's MÉTIER would be finance.

miasma (my-AZ-mah), noun

An unhealthy atmosphere or environment; an unpleasant feeling pervading the air.

"These appearances, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon—or it may be there they have their ghastly origin in the rank MIASMA of the tarn" – Edgar Allan Poe, American author and poet

microcosm (my-kruh-KAHZ-uhm), noun

A representation of something on a very small scale.

"Each particle is a MICROCOSM, and faithfully renders the likeness of the world." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

mien (MEEN), noun

A person's look or manner.

Dan's country-bumpkin MIEN effectively hides his shrewd business tactics.

milieu (mill-YOU), noun

Surroundings, especially surroundings of a social or cultural nature.

Poetry readings and coffee shops are not Andrew's MILIEU of choice.

millenarianism (mil-uh-NAIR-ee-uhn-ism)), noun

Any apocalyptic religious, philosophical, or social movement that predicts radical disaster, particularly at the end of the current millenium or the beginning of the new one.

As they worried about the impact of computer errors on the family fortune during the change from 1999 to 2000, the Cadburys briefly believed in MILLENARIANISM.

millenium (mil-EN-ee-um), noun

A period of a thousand years.

Millicent takes a MILLENIUM to get ready for society balls, but the results, typically, are worth the wait.

minimalism (MIN-ih-mull-iz-um), noun

A school of art in which "less is more"—clean and uncluttered paintings; sculpture with simple lines; fiction written in a lean and spare style; and music with uncomplicated scores and minimal instruments.

John Cage's MINIMALIST composition 433 consists of four and a half minutes of silence.

minion (MIN-yuhn), noun

A follower of someone in an important position.

"I caught this morning morning's MINION, king- / dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding." – Gerard Manley Hopkins, English poet and Jesuit priest

minutiae (mih-NOO-shuh), noun
Small, trifling matters that one encounters on an average day.
The MINUTIAE of golf, tennis, and spa treatments at the club can become utterly tiresome.

misanthrope (MISS-anne-throwp), noun
A person of anti-social nature who dislikes other people and thinks poorly of them until they give him reason not to.
Harold has become a veritable MISANTHROPE since Anabelle refused to attend the regatta with him.

misconstrue (miss-kuhn-STROO), verb
To misinterpret or to take in a wrong sense.
The disagreement over the price of the yacht was due merely to the fact that David MISCONSTRUED the terms of the offer.

misogyny (mih-SAHJ-uh-nee), noun
An intense hatred of women.
A lifetime of rejection had transformed him from a loving person into a rabid MISOGYNIST.

missive (MISS-iv), noun
An official or formal letter.
He sent out a MISSIVE informing all employees that, henceforth, there would be no smoking in their quarters—but he forgot to remove the ashtrays.

mnemonic (neh-MON-ik), adjective, noun
A rhyme, sentence, or other word pattern designed to help one memorize facts.
Roy G. Biv is the MNEMONIC for the colors of a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.

modernism (MOD-er-nih-zum), noun
Describes a modern avant-garde style of painting, sculpture, or architecture.
"Post-modernism is MODERNISM with the optimism taken out." – Robert Hewison, British historian

modicum (MOD-ih-kuhm), noun
A modest amount; a small quantity.

> "To be human is to have one's little MODICUM of romance secreted away in one's composition." – Mark Twain

moiety (MOY-ih-tee), noun
A part, portion, or share.
When I go out to dinner with my wife and kids, I don't order a meal for myself, as my dinner is a MOIETY from each of theirs.

monastic (moh-NAS-tik), adjective
Relating to the practice of withdrawing from society to live a quiet, contemplative life, often dedicated to religious faith.
Saint Pachomius founded the first organized Christian MONASTIC community.

monistic (moh-NIS-tik), noun
The idea that everything—including philosophy, religion, and mysticism—can be reduced to a single substance or explained by a single principle.
Of course we believe the world is MONISTIC. Wealth is the source of everything in the universe.

monotheism (MOH-no-THEE-iz-um), noun

A belief in one omnipotent, omniscient God who is actively involved in the workings of both the physical universe that He created and the society of men who dwell in it.

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all MONOTHEISTIC.

moot (MOOT), adjective

A fact or point that is uncertain or no longer relevant.

Whether to continue injecting growth hormones became a MOOT point as Alex grew from five feet to five-nine in eighteen months.

morass (muh-RASS), noun

A confusing or troublesome situation from which it is difficult to disentangle oneself.

"One idea is enough to organize a life and project it / Into unusual but viable forms, but many ideas merely / Lead one thither into a MORASS of their own good intentions." – John Ashbery, American poet

mordantly (MORE-dant-lee), adverb

To behave in a negative, malicious, or damaging fashion.

"The ocean looked dead too, dead gray waves hissing MORDANTLY along the beach." – John Fowles, British novelist and essayist

mores (MORE-ayz), noun

The accepted norms of social behavior for the time and society in which you live.

Grant learned the hard way that MORES vary from country to country when he made the faux pas of trying to shake the hand of the Thai businessman.

moribund (MOR-ih-bund), adjective

Lacking vigor; soon to be dead or defunct.

Ever since its head chef left for the Food Network, that gourmet restaurant has become MORIBUND and is likely to close soon.

morose (muh-ROHSS), adjective

Gloomy and ill-humored.

Now that his parents have taken away his private plane, Anthony has become positively MOROSE.

motif (mow-TEEF), noun

A dominant or frequently repeated theme, design, image, or idea.

The Whittingtons' china has a diamond-shaped MOTIF that is a testament to how the family made its fortune.

mot juste (MOW-zshoost), noun

The perfect word or phrase to communicate precisely what you mean to say.

Years of elocution lessons have left Paulina capable of leavening every occasion with a suitable MOT JUSTE.

multifarious (mull-tea-FAH-ree-us), adjective

Varied, wide-ranging, versatile, covering many different areas or fields.

Yvonne's MULTIFARIOUS talents include showing horses, lacrosse, and opera singing.

multilateral (mull-tea-LAH-terr-ul), adjective

An agreement or accord requiring two nations or states to take the same position or action on an issue or problem.

A pacifist, he frequently spoke out for MULTILATERAL nuclear disarmament.

munificent (myoo-NIFF-uh-suhnt), adjective

Characterized by great generosity.

The Pattersons are so MUNIFICENT that they give to charity year-round rather than merely at times when giving

offers tax benefits.

muse (MEWS), noun

The source of one's creative or artistic inspiration, named after the mythical Greek Muses said to be patrons of the fine arts.

"O for a MUSE of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention." – William Shakespeare

mutable (MYOO-tuh-bull), adjective

Subject to change at a moment's notice.

> "For is the same! For, be it joy or sorrow, / The path of its departure still is free: / Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow; / Nought may endure but MUTABILITY" – Percy Bysshe Shelley, English Romantic poet

myriad (MIR-ee-ud), noun

An abundance of possibilities, selections, choices, or options.

The MYRIAD possibilities inherent in selling her ex-husband's family diamonds for $10 million boggled Elizabeth's mind.

“The comic spirit is given to us in order that we may analyze, weigh, and clarify things in us which NETTLE us, or which we are outgrowing, or trying to reshape.”

Thornton Wilder, American playwright and novelist

nacelle (NAY-sell), noun

The pod-shaped outer hull of an airplane engine.

Bentley always has his family crest imprinted on the NACELLE of each of his private planes.

nadir (NAY-der), noun

Rock-bottom, the lowest of the low, the worst a thing can get or become.

We always have to attend the Wallingtons' Christmas party, due to their standing, but, in truth, that dreadfully boring event is always the NADIR of our social calendar.

nanosecond (NAN-oh-sek-uhnd), noun

A time period equal to one billionth of a second.

Amanda's new diamond-encrusted watch not only has a second hand but also a NANOSECOND hand.

nascent (NAY-sent), adjective

Having just been born or invented and still in the early stages of growth and development.

It's always amusing to watch the nouveau riche during the NASCENT period of their adjustment to luxury.

nationalism (NAH-shin-ul-iz-um), noun

The idea that citizens should take great pride in their country and support it to the hilt; extreme patriotism.

Albert Einstein called NATIONALISM "the measles of mankind."

natter (NAH-ter), verb

To talk ceaselessly; babble.

The way Emily NATTERS endlessly about her family's new yacht is revolting to those of us who have owned several yachts over the years.

Nebuchadnezzar (neb-yoo-could-NEZ-er), noun

A king mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible who destroyed Jerusalem and exiled the Israelites to Babylonia.

"And NEBUCHADNEZZAR was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." – Daniel 4:33

nebulous (NEB-yoo-luhs), adjective

An idea or plan that is vague and not well thought out; ill-defined; lacking concretes.

Jay's plans for what he would do when he graduated college were NEBULOUS at best.

necessitate (nuh-SESS-ih-tate), verb

To make necessary; to obligate.

"Each coming together of man and wife, even if they have been mated for many years, should be a fresh adventure; each winning should NECESSITATE a fresh wooing." – Marie Carmichael Stopes, British scientist and birth-control pioneer

necromancy (NEH-kroh-man-see), noun

The ability to gain new knowledge by communicating with the dead; magic and trickery in general.

"The so-called science of poll-taking is not a science at all but mere NECROMANCY." – E. B. White, American author

nefarious (nih-FARE-ee-us), adjective

Inherently evil, malicious, and unjust.

"You were preceded by your NEFARIOUS reputation," the sheriff said to the gunslinger who had just sidled up to the bar.

nemesis (nem-UH-sis), noun

An opponent one is unable to defeat.

> "How wonderful to live with one's NEMESIS! You may be miserable, but you feel forever in the right." – Erica Jong, American author and teacher

neoconservative (NEE-oh-kon-SERVE-ah-tive), noun
A liberal who has become a conservative.
We've removed Bradley from our list of social contacts because he has become such a NEOCONSERVATIVE.

neologism (nee-AHL-uh-jizm), noun
A new word, or an "old" word used in a new way.
William Shakespeare coined such NEOLOGISMS as "gossip," "swagger," and "domineering."

neonatal (NEE-oh-NAY-tul), adjective
Of, or relating to newborn children.
Honestly, the Atkinsons treat their grown children as though they still require NEONATAL care. No wonder they never get invited to any of our galas.

neophyte (NEE-uh-fight), noun
A beginner or novice.

> "Like footmen and upstairs maids, wine stewards are portrayed as acolytes of the privileged, ever eager to intimidate the NEOPHYTE and spurn the unwary." – Frank J. Prial, former New York Times wine columnist

nepotism (NEH-poh-tiz-um), noun
The practice of a business owner or manager giving favorable treatment to his family; e.g., hiring his son for a summer job, giving the company's advertising work to his wife's ad agency, etc.
Rampant NEPOTISM in the company prevented most of the employees from rising very far up the ranks.

nether (NETH-uhr), adjective
Located below or under something else.
"I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot to Palestine for a touch of his NETHER lip." – William Shakespeare

nettle (NET-uhl), verb
To provoke, irritate, or annoy.
"The comic spirit is given to us in order that we may analyze, weigh, and clarify things in us which NETTLE us, or which we are outgrowing, or trying to reshape." – Thornton Wilder, American playwright and novelist

nexus (NEK-sus), noun
A linkage or connection between two or more things.
"Every time a message seems to grab us, and we think, 'I just might try it,' we are at the NEXUS of choice and persuasion that is advertising." – Andrew Hacker, American media critic

niggling (NIG-ling), adjective
Demanding a great deal of care, attention, or time; or, trifling and insignificant.
People just don't understand how difficult it is on us to attend to all the NIGGLING needs of our servants.

nihilism (NIE-uh-lizz-uhm), noun

The belief that nothing can be known with absolute certainty, resulting in an intense skepticism of almost everything, especially religion and moral principles.

"NIHILISM is best done by professionals." – Iggy Pop, American singer and songwriter

nimbus (NIM-bus), noun

A halo of light surrounding the head of a saint or other holy person.

"Sally is such a goody two-shoes, you'd think she would have a NIMBUS on top of her head," Nancy said to the girls.

nitid (NIT-id), adjective

Bright and lustrous.

Brock and Jenny flew through NITID moonbeams in Brock's new Gulfstream GIV personal jet.

noblesse oblige (no-BLESS-oh-BLEEZH), noun

An act of generosity, charity, or kindness performed by a rich person for the benefit of someone less fortunate than himself, viewed by the giver as paying the universe back for his good fortune.

Donald gave the young man a job not out of a sense of pity or guilt, but out of a sense of NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

nomenclature (NO-men-klay-cherr), noun

A labeling or naming system used in a specialized field or industry.

Even an activity as seemingly simple as macramé has a NOMENCLATURE all it's own, indecipherable to the layperson or newbie.

nominal (NAHM-ih-nl), adjective

A thing of relatively minor importance; an insignificant amount or volume of something.

For a NOMINAL fee, the store delivers your new widescreen TV to your home and sets it up for you.

nominalism (NAHM-ih-nl-iz-um), noun

A philosophy that denies the existence of universal truths.

Some scientists suspect that, rather than being universal, the laws of physics may vary in different regions of the universe—a strong supporting argument for NOMINALISM.

nonagenarian (none-uh-jen-AIR-ee-en), noun

A person in his or her nineties.

When you're a NONAGENARIAN, it begins to occur to you that you could in fact live to be one hundred.

non compos mentis (NAHN-KAHM-pohs-MEN-tiss), adjective

Crazy; insane; not in one's right mind.

When Bryce suggested he was considering the ministry, rather than joining the family bond business, we were certain he was NON COMPOS MENTIS.

nondescript (non-dih-SKRIPT), adjective

Lacking distinction; ordinary.

"Actors ought to be larger than life. You come across quite enough ordinary, NONDESCRIPT people in daily life and I don't see why you should be subjected to them on the stage too." – Donald Sinden, British actor

nonentity (non-EN-tih-tee), noun

A person or thing considered completely unimportant.

Ever since Cassandra scorned us at the Brackingtons' Thanksgiving gala, we have taken to treating her as a NONENTITY.

nonpareil (non-pah-RAYLE), adjective

Without equal or peer.

We could tell Jeanette was a typical parvenu when she attempted to convince us that Bennington Posh Couture golf bags are NONPAREIL.

nonpartisan (non-PAHR-tih-zuhn), adjective

Not in support of a particular political party or special interest group.

The Vallinghams pride themselves in being NONPARTISAN, but they have never been known to vote even for a moderate Democrat.

nonplussed (none-plust), adjective

In modern usage, not being bothered by commotion; undisturbed by what is happening around you; in traditional usage, the opposite of the modern definition.

The construction on the bridge left him NONPLUSSED, because he enjoyed listening to books on tape in his car.

non sequitur (nahn-SEH-kwit-ur), noun

A conclusion or statement that does not seem to follow from that which preceded it.

Hilary's belief that she was now welcome in our group was, clearly, a NON SEQUITUR on her part.

nostrum (NAH-strum), noun

An ineffective solution that is a quick fix or band-aid, covering up a problem or masking its symptoms, but never addressing its root cause for a permanent fix.

"America's present need is not NOSTRUMS but normalcy." – Warren G. Harding

nouveau riche (noo-voh-REESH), adjective, noun

A person who has recently acquired wealth.

The most distinguished families in the club snubbed him because he was NOUVEAU RICHE.

noxious (NOCK-shuss), adjective

Morally harmful and pernicious.

Even with his wealth, good looks, and charm, Steven has such a NOXIOUS personality that we always feel awful after spending time with him.

nuance (NOO-ahnts), noun

A subtle difference in meaning, expression, or tone.

"[Venice] in winter is rich with the bittersweet NUANCE and somber beauty of the once-was." – Terry Weeks, American travel writer

nubile (NOO-bile), adjective

Of sexually developed and attractive youth.

We have explained time and again to Melinda that she must get a personal trainer like the rest of us to be truly NUBILE.

nugatory (NOO-guh-tore-ee), adjective

Trifling, worthless, and ineffective.

We spend our time like most, with the NUGATORY pastimes of polo, tennis on grass courts, and weekends in Europe.

nullify (NUHL-uh-fie), verb

To make something valueless or ineffective.

We keep our collections under lock and key because, sometimes, merely breathing on them NULLIFIES their value.

nymph (NIMF), noun
A spirit linked to a particular place or element.

> “Reason is a supple NYMPH, and slippery as a fish by nature.” – D. H. Lawrence, British author

“The bottom of being is left logically OPAQUE to us, as something which we simply come upon and find, and about which (if we wish to act) we should pause and wonder as little as possible.”

William James, American psychologist and philosopher

O

obdurate (OB-doo-rit), adjective
Stubborn and unyielding.

> "The fates are not quite OBDURATE; / They have a grim, sardonic way / Of granting them who supplicate / The thing they wanted yesterday." –Roselle Mercier Montgomery, American poet

obeisance (oh-BEE-sance), noun
Deferential respect or homage, or an act or gesture expressing the same.

Rachael practiced OBEISANCE by allowing the elderly woman to sit in her plush opera box, rather than in the mezzanine.

obfuscate (OB-few-skate), verb
To talk or write about a subject in a way that deliberately makes it unclear, selectively omits certain facts, or communicates wrong ideas or impressions, so that the listener or reader does not grasp the whole truth of the situation.

Despite his Ivy League education, Alexander seems able only to OBFUSCATE any subject upon which he touches.

objurgatory (AHB-jer-ga-tor-ee), adjective
A critical attitude voicing or implying an objection or complaint.

"I can to some extent sympathize with the OBJURGATORY tone of certain critics who feel that I write too much." – Joyce Carol Oates, American author

oblique (oh-BLEAK), adjective
Indirectly or deviously achieved.

If direct appeals do not work, Amanda is always quick to use OBLIQUE methods in order to get her father to buy her whatever luxury item she wants.

obsequious (uhb-SEE-kwi-us), adjective
Subservient; eager to listen and to please others to an excessive degree; behaving in the manner of a servant or slave.

> "[The political mind] is a strange mixture of vanity and timidity, of an OBSEQUIOUS attitude at one time and a delusion of grandeur at another time. –Calvin Coolidge

obsolescence (ob-suh-LESS-uhnts), noun
The state of being no longer useful.

Roderick found, to his dismay, that some of the new Maserati models had lapsed into OBSOLESCENCE almost as soon as they hit the showroom floor.

obstinate (AHB-stih-nit), adjective
Inflexible in one's opinions and attitudes; refusing to change or accede to the wishes of others.

"The male sex still constitutes in many ways the most OBSTINATE vested interest one can find." – Francis Pakenham, British social reformer

obstreperous (ob-STREP-er-us), adjective
Describes a trouble-maker who is noisy, unruly, or otherwise attracts attention in his endeavor to be difficult.

Two OBSTREPEROUS employees made the training class a nightmare for the instructor.

obtuse (ahb-TOOS), adjective

Lacking understanding, intelligence, and perception; unable to comprehend; having a dense mind.

Thomas was so OBTUSE, he didn't realize his inappropriate behavior was making his friends uncomfortable.

obviate (OB-vee-ate), verb

To anticipate, and therefore prevent, difficulties or disadvantages.

We changed the location of our fall gala at the last minute, OBVIATING the need to cut anyone from our ever-expanding guest list.

occlude (oh-KLOOD), verb

To block or obstruct; to close off a passage or entranceway.

Debris from the second-floor construction OCCLUDED the entryway to the laundry room in Linda's beach house.

occultation (ahk-uhl-TAY-shin), noun

The act of hiding or blocking from view.

With disguises offering a bit of needed OCCULTATION, we were able to hit Manhattan's hot spots away from the glare of the dreaded paparazzi.

odal (OH-dull), noun

Absolute ownership of a property that is beyond dispute and can never be revoked.

Among the Norse, land allotted to a warrior at the time of conquest became ODAL after his family had held it for three generations.

odious (OH-dee-us), adjective

To be so offensive or disgusting that people are repulsed or experience revulsion.

"To depend upon a profession is a less ODIOUS form of slavery than to depend upon a father." – Virginia Woolf, British essayist and novelist

odoriferous (oh-der-ih-ferr-us), adjective

Bad smelling; foul.

Eleanor believed she would enjoy her weekend trek through the South American rainforest, but she found the animals too noisy, the constant rain unpleasant, and the forest's ODORIFEROUS vegetation distasteful.

oeniphile (EE-nuh-file), noun

A connoisseur of wines.

Despite his relatively young age, Brad's family has brought him up to be a consummate OENIPHILE.

oeuvre (OO-vruh), noun

An artist's, writer's, or composer's body of work, treated as a whole.

Esmerelda is familiar with and adores all of Puccini's OEUVRE, but many find his operas overly mawkish.

offal (OH-full), noun

Rotting waste; decaying organic matter. In general, anything considered garbage or refuse.

"I have often told you that I am that little fish who swims about under a shark and, I believe, lives indelicately on its OFFAL." – Zelda Fitzgerald, American author

officious (oh-FISH-ee-us), adjective

Asserting authority or power in an obnoxious, overbearing, or pompous manner.

"There is immunity in reading, immunity in formal society, in office routine, in the company of old friends and in the giving of OFFICIOUS help to strangers, but there is no sanctuary in one bed from the memory of another." – Cyril Connolly, British literary critic and writer

ogle (OH-guhl), verb

To look at in an amorous or impertinent way.

No one would want to trade places with us if they only knew how tiresome it becomes to have the paparazzi constantly OGLING you.

olfactory (ole-FAK-tore-ee), adjective

Related to the sense of smell.

Miranda and Jonathan savored the OLFACTORY pleasures wafting from early-opening bakeries on the Upper West Side.

oligarchy (OH-lih-gar-kee), noun

A nation, state, or other place where the population is governed by a relatively small group of people, especially when all are members of the same family.

Most family owned businesses are OLIGARCHIES, not democracies.

oligopoly (oh-lih-GAH-poll-lee), noun

Control of an industry, sector, or market by a small number of companies dominating that particular niche.

One can argue that Intel and Microsoft collectively are an OLIGOPOLY in personal computing.

ombudsman (ohm-BUDZ-min), noun

A person who is charged with mediating disputes between businesses and consumers, students and a university, etc.

All it took to get Brock off of academic probation at U Penn was to have his father remind the OMBUDSMAN of how much money the family had donated to the university over the years.

omnipotent (ahm-NIP-uh-tuhnt), adjective

All powerful.

> "An OMNIPOTENT God is the only being with no reason to lie." – Mason Cooley, American author

omniscient (ahm-NIH-shent), adjective

Describes someone who knows everything.

"The god of love, if omnipotent and OMNISCIENT, must be the god of cancer and epilepsy as well." – George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

omnivore (AHM-nih-vore), noun

An animal that eats both plants and other animals.

I ordered a delicious steak salad with crumbled blue cheese—an OMNIVORE'S delight.

onerous (OH-nerr-us), adjective

Describes a difficult task or heavy responsibility that one does not desire.

Caring for his son's large aquarium quickly went from an interesting hobby to an ONEROUS burden.

onomatopoeia (on-uh-ma-tuh-PEE-uh), noun

Words that sound like, or suggest, their meaning.

The spring gala, with its popping corks, fizzing champagne glasses, and thumping music was a cornucopia of ONOMATOPOEIA.

onus (OH-nuss), noun

Obligation, responsibility, duty, or burden.

The ONUS for choosing the color scheme for our new lacrosse uniforms fell ultimately to Tabitha, who had previously chosen the design for our polo uniforms.

opaque (oh-PAYK), adjective

Hard to understand; obscure.

"The bottom of being is left logically OPAQUE to us, as something which we simply come upon and find, and about which (if we wish to act) we should pause and wonder as little as possible." – William James, American psychologist and philosopher

operose (OP-uh-roass), adjective

Hard-working and industrious.

What's the point of being OPEROSE when our social connections help us to achieve success with little effort?

opprobrium (uh-PRO-bree-uhm), noun

Disgrace incurred by outrageously shameful conduct.

Natasha incurred OPPROBRIUM when, in a fit of anger, she deliberately smashed her Waterford crystal wine glass at the Smythingtons' annual Thanksgiving gala.

opine (oh-PYNE), verb

To give your opinion.

The way that Charlotte OPINES about fashion, you'd think she created couture rather than just purchasing it.

opulent (AHP-yoo-lent), adjective

Reflecting wealth and affluence.

Donald Trump showcases his OPULENT lifestyle by wearing designer suits, drinking Cristal champagne, and traveling in private airplanes.

opus (OH-puss), noun

A major work of music written by a composer.

The Breckinridges commissioned the composer's next OPUS, which will be debuted at the family's fall ball.

orator (OR-ray-ter), noun

A skilled and persuasive public speaker.

Tom over-estimated his abilities as an ORATOR and, consequently, stayed at the podium far longer than the audience wanted him to.

ordinance (OR-dih-nance), noun

A specific law or regulation.

The lavish tree house Roger built for his kids was in clear violation of at least half a dozen local ORDINANCES.

orgiastic (or-jee-AS-tick), adjective

Arousing unrestrained emotional release.

William becomes loathsomely ORGIASTIC when he attends and bids at art auctions.

orotund (OR-uh-tund), adjective

Characterizes a voice distinguished by strength, fullness, and clearness.

In a beguilingly OROTUND voice, the conductor offered a synopsis of the evening's opera.

orthodox (OR-thuh-docks), adjective

Mainstream; conventional; adhering to the strictest interpretation of a law or religion.

ORTHODOX medicine has long ignored the obvious effect diet and nutrition have on health and illness.

oscillate (AHSS-uh-layt), verb

To change one's mind frequently about beliefs and opinions.

We can hardly keep up with Lydia's choices regarding the quality of luxury jewelers because she OSCILLATES from week to week.

osculant (OS-kyuh-lunt), adjective

Describes a passionate kiss.

"He planted a hell of a kiss on me: lips, tongue, the entire OSCULANT assemblage." – Charlaine Harris, New York Times bestselling mystery writer

osmosis (oz-MOW-sis), noun

A subtle and gradual assimilation of new knowledge based on one's proximity to another with greater knowledge.

Just hanging out with Bob, who was an A student, seemed to help Vincent improve his grades, as if he was learning what Bob knew through OSMOSIS.

ostensibly (ah-STEN-sih-blee), adverb

Something that exists or has been done for what would seem an obvious reason.

The nouveau riche always seek to spend time with us, OSTENSIBLY to be absorbed into our world, but they will never fully be a part of our community.

ostentatious (ah-sten-TAY-shus), adjective

Pretentious; presented in a showy manner so as to impress others; visibly flaunting one's wealth or success.

"The man who is OSTENTATIOUS of his modesty is twin to the statue that wears a fig-leaf." – Mark Twain

ostracize (OS-truh-size), verb

To exclude from society, friendship, community, etc.

Once we learned that Sasha had been planting stories about us in the society pages, we, of course, had to OSTRACIZE her permanently from our group.

outré (oo-TRAY), adjective

Radically unconventional; outside the limits of expected conduct or behavior.

"One of life's intriguing paradoxes is that hierarchical social order makes cheap rents and OUTRÉ artists' colonies possible." – Florence King, American author

overweening (OH-ver-WEE-ning), adjective

Extremely presumptuous, arrogant, and overconfident.

"Golf is an open exhibition of OVERWEENING ambition, courage deflated by stupidity, skill soured by a whiff of arrogance." – Alistair Cooke, British-born American journalist and broadcaster

oxidation (oks-ih-DAY-shin), noun

A chemical reaction that increases the oxygen content of a compound or material.

When Carlton viewed the wreck of the Titanic from the window of a submersible, he was shocked to see how OXIDATION had ravaged the ship.

oxymoron (ok-see-MORE-on), noun

A phrase made by combining two words that are contradictory or incongruous.

Melissa sheepishly used the OXYMORON "accidentally on purpose" to explain to her father why her emergency credit card included a charge for $500 Manolo Blahnik heels.

“I want to kiss God on His nose
and watch Him sneeze / and so do
you. / Not out of disrespect. / Out
of PIQUE. / Out of a man-to-man
thing.”

Anne Sexton, American poet and author

P

palaver (pa-LAH-ver), noun

A rambling, meandering stream-of-consciousness conversation spoken to prove or make a point.

Don't ask Eileen about collecting art. The result will be twenty minutes of mind-numbing PALAVER.

palimpsest (PAL-imp-sest), noun

A parchment manuscript on which the text is written over older, earlier text, much like an oil portrait or landscape painted over another painting.

The newest addition to the Pattersons' rare manuscript collection turned out to be a PALIMPSEST, covering a text nearly 1,000 years old.

palindrome (pal-in-DROHM), noun

A word or sentence that reads the same forwards as backwards.

At private school, Evelyn learned about PALINDROMES, including, "Madam, I'm Adam."

palliate (PAL-ee-ate), verb

To treat a patient so that his symptoms abate even though he still has the disease.

We introduced Amanda to Roberto, in attempt to PALLIATE the broken heart that Amanda suffered over her breakup with one of the scions of the Chesterfield family.

pallid (PAL-id), adjective

A wan, sickly, washed-out appearance indicating illness or weakness, or lack of energy, strength, and vitality.

Many of us maintain a PALLID pallor because we want to make it clear that we do not need to go outdoors unless we so choose.

palpable (PAL-pah-bull), adjective

Refers to something so strong or intense that its presence is impossible to ignore.

When Alistair did not give Lorissa the luxury watch she was expecting for her birthday, the silence was PALPABLE.

panacea (pan-uh-SEE-uh), noun

A universal solution for all problems, diseases, or woes.

Parents today see buying their kids everything they want as a PANACEA for misery, boredom, and unhappiness.

pandemic (pan-DEM-ik), noun

An outbreak of a disease that threatens to spread rapidly and endanger the population of an entire nation or planet.

Many scientists feared that Asian bird flu would become a pandemic.

Pangaea (pan-GEE-uh), noun

A single massive continent that comprised all the land on the Earth before the crust shifted and the Pangaea divided into many smaller continents.

The PANGAEA existed until Mesozoic times, when it divided into two separate continents.

panoply (PAN-oh-plee), noun

A complete or impressive collection; a splendid or abundant array.

The gallery offered a PANOPLY of African face masks.

pantheon (PAN-thee-on), noun

The group of all the gods of a particular religion or culture, or a group of important people in a particular field or region.

The sons of Odin, Thor and Loki, represent good and evil in the PANTHEON of the Norse gods.

paradigm (PAH-ruh-dyme), noun

An observation or discovery in conflict with known facts, beliefs, and theories.

The new PARADIGM for fashion, according to Sasha, is extremely expensive clothes that look as inexpensive as possible.

paradox (PAIR-uh-doks), noun

A seemingly absurd and self-contradicting situation that seems impossible but may in fact be true.

The article profiled a man who was a real PARADOX; he was grossly overweight, yet had tremendous athletic stamina.

parameter (pah-RAM-ih-terr), noun

A factor or variable that must be taken into account when solving a problem or understanding a situation.

The weight of Paul's grand piano is a PARAMETER that must be taken into account when building the mansion's new music room and ballroom.

parity (PAH-rih-tee), noun

The condition of everyone being more or less equal.

The firemen received a raise to help them achieve pay PARITY with the sanitation workers and police department.

parlance (PAR-lunss), noun

To speak in the vernacular or jargon used by a particular industry, profession, or group.

By using the terms "discourse," "pedagogy," and "literary criticism," the professors spoke in the PARLANCE of academia.

parsimonious (par-sih-MOAN-ee-us), adjective

To be conservative in spending and tight with a dollar; to agree to part with money or other resources only grudgingly and after much cajoling.

Esmerelda can be surprisingly PARSIMONIOUS, considering that her family's fortune is among the greatest possessed by our social contacts.

pathological (path-a-LODGE-ick-uhl), adjective

Compulsive in nature; possessing of a belief system or mindset that makes one unable to resist repetition of a particular type of behavior, e.g., a pathological liar.

Diane's PATHOLOGICAL need for attention has caused her, on more than one occasion, to plant lies about herself in the society pages.

paucity (PAW-city), noun

A lack of something, a small supply or limited selection.

"It is very strange, and very melancholy, that the PAUCITY of human pleasures should persuade us ever to call hunting one of them." – Samuel Johnson, British moralist and poet

pecuniary (pih-KYOO-nee-air-ee), adjective

Something related to money.

Because all of Craig's articles had a strong PECUNIARY slant, his editor moved him from the features page to the finance page.

pedagogue (PED-ah-gog), noun

A strict, humorless, no-nonsense teacher.

"The negative cautions of science are never popular. If the experimentalist would not commit himself, the social philosopher, the preacher, and the PEDAGOGUE tried the harder to give a short-cut answer." – Margaret Mead, American cultural anthropologist

pedantry (PEH-dan-tree), noun

An obsessive behavior of being proper and technically correct down to the last detail.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge defined PEDANTRY as "the use of words unsuitable to the time, place, and company."

pejorative (pih-JOR-a-tiv), adjective

Insulting; meant as a put-down or to belittle the other person.

"Wordsmith" is a corporate term used to denote someone who is a good writer, but professional writers see it as PEJORATIVE.

penitent (PEN-ih-tent), adjective

Feeling sorry and regretful that you have done something wrong.

According to Ambrose Bierce's jaded view, the PENITENT are typically those undergoing or awaiting punishment.

penultimate (pen-UHL-tah-met), adjective

Next to last in importance.

The Whittingtons' Christmas gala is the PENULTIMATE party of the social season.

per capita (per-KA-pih-tah), adjective

Per person; pertaining to a single individual.

We find it satisfying to mull over the fact that the PER CAPITA income among our social contacts is greater than that of many countries.

perfervid (per-FUR-vid), adjective

Overly intense and passionate; overblown and dramatic.

We laughed at the distastefully PERFERVID love letters that Roland sent to Germaine.

perfunctory (per-FUNK-ter-ee), adjective

Implemented or executed quickly, without much care or thought put into it.

"The tale is so contrived and PERFUNCTORY that many readers will be tempted to skip to the real story in the second half of the book." – Tim Parks, British novelist

peripatetic (per-ih-pa-TET-ik), adjective

Someone who wanders from career to career, job to job, company to company, or place to place, seemingly without a clear goal or definiteness of purpose.

While waiting to receive his trust fund at age thirty, Giles lived a PERIPATETIC lifestyle.

periphery (puh-RIFF-uh-ree), noun

The outermost part or boundary; the outside edge.

Craig's plans are always on the PERIPHERY of what could charitably be called normal behavior.

permeate (PUR-mee-ayt), verb

To penetrate; to spread throughout.

The scent of Donna's exclusive perfume quickly PERMEATED the entrance hall of the Blakelys' stately home.

pernicious (purr-NISH-us), adjective

Resulting in damage or harm; having a debilitating effect.

We believe that, once the producers of luxury items become publicly traded companies, the results will be PERNICIOUS.

perturbation (purr-ter-BAY-shun), noun

Originally used to describe the phenomenon of one planet's gravitational field throwing another planet's orbit slightly out of kilter. Today, perturbation refers more generally to any disturbance that alters the normal state or function of a system, moving object, person, or process.

"O polished PERTURBATION! golden care! / That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide / To many a

watchful night." – William Shakespeare

petulant (PET-chew-lant), adjective

Describes someone who sulks, complains, or whines because he or she is acting immaturely or is ill-tempered.

Emma was sick and tired of her husband's PETULANT pouting.

phalanx (FAY-lanks), noun

A large division or group of soldiers grouped closely together in an orderly fashion for marching or fighting.

Philip of Macedon armed each man with a long spear so the PHALANX bristled like a porcupine.

Pharisee (FAH-ree-see), noun

A person who is self-righteous and hypocritical.

The state Attorney General was a PHARISEE who prosecuted others for the same crimes he was secretly committing himself.

philanthropist (fill-ANN-throw-pist), noun

A person who generously gives his or her time, energy, and money to charity.

Bill Gates is the most proactive PHILANTHROPIST out of all the billionaires who care to invest their time in contributing to charitable causes.

philistine (FILL-ih-steen), noun

A crude and ignorant person who is disinterested in and does not appreciate culture and the arts.

"A PHILISTINE is a full-grown person whose interests are of a material and commonplace nature, and whose mentality is formed of the stock ideas and conventional ideals of his or her group and time." – Vladimir Nabokov, Russian-American novelist

phoenix (FEE-niks), noun

A mythical bird about the size of an eagle, but with brilliantly colored plumage, that dies by fire and then is reborn from the ashes.

One day the PHOENIX appeared in the forests of France, and legend has it that all the other birds became instantly jealous.

pied-a-terre (pyed-ah-TARE), noun

A second home or apartment, usually small, used as a place to stay for short trips to the location in lieu of renting a hotel room.

We were amazed that Alison and her family could survive in a PIED-A-TERRE containing just 2,500 square feet.

piety (PIE-eh-tee), noun

Devoutly religious behavior, especially when exhibited publicly to let others know how pious you are.

"The path of true PIETY is so plain as to require but little political direction." – George Washington

pique (PEEK), noun, verb

To generate interest or curiosity; a feeling of annoyance resulting from a perceived insult or injustice.

"I want to kiss God on His nose and watch Him sneeze / and so do you. / Not out of disrespect. / Out of PIQUE. / Out of a man-to-man thing." – Anne Sexton, American poet and author

plethora (PLETH-uh-ruh), noun

An excessive amount of something.

Agnes tried a PLETHORA of wines before she finally decided on her favorite vintage.

pluralism (PLOOR-al-iz-im), noun

The understanding and tolerance of a diversity of differing cultures and views within a single society.

As long as someone comes from a family of high-standing, we wholeheartedly embrace PLURALISM.

polemic (pah-LEM-ik), noun

A long, rambling speech or diatribe, the goal of which is to prove a point or sway the listener to see your point of view.

"He had a strong will and a talent for POLEMIC." – Saul Bellow, American author

polymath (POHL-ee-math), noun

A person with a wide range of intellectual interests or a broad base of knowledge in many different disciplines.

"I had a terrible vision: I saw an encyclopedia walk up to a POLYMATH and open him up." – Karl Kraus, Austrian writer

polyphonic (pahl-ee-FAHN-ik), adjective

Having many different sounds.

"The guitar is a small orchestra. It is POLYPHONIC. Every string is a different color, a different voice." – Andres Segovia, Spanish classical guitarist

populism (POP-you-liz-um), noun

A political movement or policy that appeals to the masses—the average working man or woman—not the upper class.

"Being naked approaches being revolutionary; going barefoot is mere POPULISM." – John Updike, American novelist and literary critic

portent (poor-TENT), noun

A warning sign that something bad is going to happen.

In Ray Bradbury's novel Something Wicked This Way Comes, the carnival coming to town is a PORTENT of evil things to come.

posit (PAHZ-it), verb

To suggest or propose a theory or explanation, especially one that represents new, unusual, or non-obvious thinking and conclusions.

Astronomers POSIT that Jupiter may sustain life in its clouds.

postulate (PA-stew-late), verb

To arrive at a theory, belief, hypothesis, or principle based upon an analysis of known facts.

"The primacy of human personality has been a POSTULATE both of Christianity and of liberal democracy." – Julian Huxley, English evolutionary biologist

potentate (POH-ten-tayt), noun

A powerful dictator, king, leader, or ruler.

A much-feared POTENTATE, Victor Von Doom ruled Latvia with an iron fist.

pragmatism (PRAG-muh-tiz-um), noun

The belief that one's actions should be guided primarily based on knowledge or opinion of what is likely to work best in a given situation; the imperative to always do what is practical and effective.

Our families have succeeded in amassing great wealth over many generations because we are all, at heart, practitioners of PRAGMATISM.

prattle (PRAT-l), verb

To babble; to talk nonstop without regard as to whether what you are saying makes sense or is of any interest to the

listener.

"Infancy conforms to nobody: all conform to it, so that one babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who PRATTLE and play to it." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

precarious (prih-KAYR-ee-us), adjective

Tenuous; positioned so as to be in danger of falling; unsecured.

"Existence is no more than the PRECARIOUS attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future." – Susan Sontag, American literary theorist, philosopher, and political activist

precipitous (pri-SIP-ih-tuss), adjective

A steep drop, precarious position, unstable situation, volatile market, or rapid and sudden change.

Investors were stung Friday by a PRECIPITOUS drop in the Dow.

predestination (pree-dess-tih-NAY-shun), noun

The belief that we do not have free will, and that our lives and destinies are preordained and beyond our control.

The problem with PREDESTINATION is that whatever happens, you can say that it was meant to be, and no one can prove you wrong.

premonitory (PREH-mahn-ih-tor-ee), adjective

Strongly indicative of or intuiting that something is going to happen.

The Harrisons sold their stock in that company because they had a PREMONITORY vision that the company would soon go bankrupt.

prestidigitation (PRESS-tih-dih-ji-TAY-shun), noun

The performance of sleight-of-hand magic tricks.

The New Year's Eve gala at the Worthingtons included sumptuous meals, a full orchestra, and even a practitioner of PRESTIDIGITATION who amazed the children with her performance.

preternatural (pree-tur-NACH-err-uhl), adjective

Both supernatural and preternatural describe things that are out of the norm. But supernatural implies forces beyond understanding, while preternatural simply means abnormal or unnatural.

"I rested my knee against the cabinet for leverage and pulled hard, calling on PRETERNATURAL strength." – Mario Acevedo, American fantasy author

prima facie (pree-ma-FAY-shuh), adjective, adverb

Something accepted upon the face of the evidence until further examination proves or disproves it.

We have PRIMA FACIE evidence that it was Evelyn who fed those lies to the society page gossip columnists.

primordial (pry-MORE-dee-ul), adjective

Relating to the beginning of time or the early periods of Earth's developments.

The Summerfelds' fortune has been in the family for so long that many of us joke that it has PRIMORDIAL origins.

proctor (PROHK-ter), noun

One who manages or supervises another person's activities and affairs.

A life of luxury would be so exhausting if it weren't for the many PROCTORS who take care of our mundane activities.

procure (pro-KYORE), verb

To seek and eventually gain ownership of something.

My book dealer recently PROCURED, at considerable expense, a first edition of Great Expectations for our library.

profligate (PROF-lih-gayt), adjective

Extravagant; wasteful; activity, expenditures, or indulgences beyond that which any reasonable person would desire.

"The official account of the Church's development viewed alternative voices as expressing the views of a misguided minority, craven followers of contemporary culture, PROFLIGATE sinners, or worse." – Harold Attridge, Dean of Yale University Divinity School

pro forma (pro-FOR-mah), adverb, adjective, noun

Standard; following a commonly accepted format or process.

"Don't worry about reading the fine print," the manager told the young singer as he shoved the contract in front of him and put a pen in his hand. "It's just PRO FORMA."

proletariat (pro-leh-TARE-ee-uht), noun

A class of society whose members earn their living solely by the exchange of their labor for money.

Your average dentist thinks he is upper class, but in reality, he is just another member of the PROLETARIAT.

prolixity (pro-LICK-sih-tee), noun

Refers to a speech or piece of writing that is deliberately wordy and long-winded due to an ornate or formal style.

"The writer who loses his self-doubt, who gives way as he grows old to a sudden euphoria, to PROLIXITY, should stop writing immediately: the time has come for him to lay aside his pen." – Colette, French novelist

promulgate (PRAH-mull-gate), verb

To elevate a behavior or action—or the prohibition of a particular behavior or action—to the status of a law, rule, or regulation through public decree.

The Department of Public Works PROMULGATED mandatory recycling of all paper waste in Bergen County.

propagate (PRAH-pah-gayt), verb

To grow, breed, or cause to multiply and flourish.

"The fiction of happiness is PROPAGATED by every tongue." – Samuel Johnson, British moralist and poet

propensity (pro-PEN-sih-tee), noun

A tendency to behave in a certain way.

Despite her vehement denials, Virginia has shown us a PROPENSITY toward pomposity.

propriety (pro-PRY-ah-tee), noun

Behaving in a way that conforms to the manners and morals of polite society.

"PROPRIETY is the least of all laws, and the most observed." – François de La Rochefoucauld, French author

propitiate (pro-PISH-ee-ate), verb

To win over; to gain the approval and admiration of.

"The life that went on in [many of the street's houses] seemed to me made up of evasions and negations; shifts to save cooking, to save washing and cleaning, devices to PROPITIATE the tongue of gossip." – Willa Cather, American author

proscribe (pro-SCRIBE), transitive verb

To forbid or prohibit; frequently confused with the word "prescribe."

State law PROSCRIBES the keeping of wild animals as house pets.

proxy (PRAHK-see), noun

The authority, typically in writing, to represent someone else or manage their affairs; a person authorized to act on the behalf of others.

While his mother was ill, Larry acted as her PROXY and made hospitalization decisions on her behalf.

puerile (PYOO-er-ill), adjective

Immature, babyish, infantile.

"An admiral whose PUERILE vanity has betrayed him into a testimonial … [is] sufficient to lure the hopeful patient to his purchase." – Samuel Hopkins Adams, American journalist

pugnacious (pug-NAY-shus), adjective

Some who always wants to argue and debate every last thing.

Teenagers are PUGNACIOUS by nature: if I say "no," he invariably asks "why."

purport (per-PORT), verb

Claiming to be something you are not; pretending to do something you aren't in fact doing.

"Doris Lessing PURPORTS to remember in the most minute detail the moth-eaten party dresses she pulled, at age thirteen, from her mother's trunk." – Tim Parks, British novelist

pusillanimous (pyoo-suh-LAN-ih-muss), adjective

Being mild or timid by nature; a shrinking violet; a person who seeks to avoid conflict, challenge, and danger.

Frank L. Baum's most PUSILLANIMOUS fictional creation is the Cowardly Lion of Oz.

pyre (PIE-err), noun

A pile of wood and twigs, lit on fire to burn bodies during funerals.

Suzette was so devastated when her fiancé ran off with another socialite that she took his belongings and burned them on a metaphorical funeral PYRE.

pyrrhic (PIR-ick), adjective

A prize or victory won at the cost of an effort that exceeds its value.

Spending $20 at the carnival game to win his child a stuffed animal worth $5 was a PYRRHIC victory at best.

“O the orator’s joys! / To inflate
the chest, to roll the thunder of the
voice out from the ribs and throat,
/ To make the people rage, weep,
hate, desire, with yourself, / To lead
America—to QUELL America with
a great tongue.”

Walt Whitman, American poet
and humanist

Q

quaff (KWAF), verb
To drink with gusto and in large volume.

> "We QUAFF the cup of life with eager haste without draining it, instead of which it only overflows the brim." – William Hazlitt, English literary critic and philosopher

quagmire (KWAG-myer), noun
A thorny problem for which there is no ready solution; a messy situation from which there is no expeditious means of escape.

"Your home is regarded as a model home, your life as a model life. But all this splendor, and you along with it … it's just as though it were built upon a shifting QUAGMIRE." – Henrik Ibsen, Norwegian playwright

qualm (KWAHM), noun
A sudden feeling of uneasiness, often linked to a pang in one's conscience.

Of course we feel no QUALMS about wanting the finest things in life; that is the legacy our forefathers bequeathed to us.

quandary (KWON-duh-ree), noun
A state of uncertainty about one's next move.

Estelle realized that her unrestrained comments to the society pages had left the rest of us quite upset, and she was in a QUANDARY as to how to repair the situation.

quash (KWAHSH), verb
To repress or subdue completely.

She quickly QUASHED the rebellion of the other members of the PTO by reminding them of the superiority of her social contacts.

quaver (KWAY-ver), verb
To tremble and shake from fear, excitement, etc.

Eloise positively QUAVERED as she made her debut at her coming out party.

quean (KWEEN), noun
A disreputable woman; a prostitute.

Esmerelda can act like such a QUEAN when her boyfriends do not automatically give her the luxury items she requires.

quell (KWELL), verb
To suppress or extinguish; or, to quiet one's own or another's anxieties.

"O the orator's joys! / To inflate the chest, to roll the thunder of the voice out from the ribs and throat, / To make the people rage, weep, hate, desire, with yourself, / To lead America—to QUELL America with a great tongue." – Walt Whitman, American poet and humanist

querulous (KWER-eh-luss), adjective
Describes a person who continually whines and complains about practically everything.

Their QUERULOUS manner with the waiter made them unpleasant and embarrassing dinner companions.

quibble (KWIB-ul), noun
To argue over a minor matter; to voice a niggling objection.

If you are not 100 percent satisfied, your money will promptly be refunded without question or QUIBBLE.

quid pro quo (KWID-pro-kwo), noun

A fair exchange of assets or services; a favor given in return for something of equal value.

In a QUID PRO QUO, Stephen helped Alex with his math homework, while Alex did Stephen's chores.

quiescent (kwee-ESS-ehnt), adjective

Being at rest, inactive, or motionless.

"There is a brief time for sex, and a long time when sex is out of place. But when it is out of place as an activity there still should be the large and quiet space in the consciousness where it lives QUIESCENT." – D. H. Lawrence, British author

quietus (kwy-EET-uhs), noun

Something that ends or settles a situation.

> "For who would bare the whips and scorns of time, / Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, / The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay, / The insolence of office, and the spurns / That patient merit of th'unworthy takes, / When he himself might his QUIETUS make / With a bare bodkin?" – William Shakespeare

quintessential (KWIN-tuh-sen-shul), adjective

The most perfect or typical example of its category or kind.

"Craving that old sweet oneness yet dreading engulfment, wishing to be our mother's and yet be our own, we stormily swing from mood to mood, advancing and retreating—the QUINTESSENTIAL model of two-mindedness." – Judith Viorst, American author and psychoanalyst

quirk (KWIHRK), noun

A peculiarity of one's personality or manner.

One of the most omnipresent QUIRKS of the nouveau riche is that they still ask the price of a luxury item, rather than simply offering to purchase it.

quisling (KWIZ-ling), noun

A traitor; a person who conspires with the enemy.

The leader of Norway's National Unity movement was executed for being a QUISLING in 1945.

quixotic (kwik-SOT-ick), adjective

A person or team pursuing a seemingly unreachable or at least extremely ambitious and difficult goal—one considered by many to be either idealist, impractical, or both.

"There is something QUIXOTIC in me about money, something meek and guilty. I want it and like it. But I cannot imagine insisting on it, pressing it out of people." – Brenda Ueland, American author

quizzical (KWIHZ-ih-kuhl), adjective

Unusual or comical; or, puzzled.

The QUIZZICAL look on Amanda's face, when David trailed a marriage-proposal banner behind his private plane, was absolutely priceless.

quondam (KWAHN-dumm), adjective

Former; at-one-time.

You should not hire the Wilkersons' QUONDAM servant because she has been known to break many objets d'art.

quotidian (kwo-TID-ee-an), adjective

Familiar; commonplace; nothing out of the ordinary.

Despite closets full of the latest Parisian couture, Alison's QUOTIDIAN complaint is that she has "nothing to wear."

“The mind that’s conscious of its
RECTITUDE, / Laughs at the
lies of rumor.”

Ovid, Roman poet

R

raconteur (RAH-kon-tour), noun

Someone who enjoys telling stories, does so frequently, and is good at it.

"O'Hara writes as a poetic one-man band, shifting rapidly among his roles as RACONTEUR, sexual adventurer, European traveler …" – Edward Mendelson, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Colombia University

raillery (RAIL-err-ee), noun

Good-natured teasing.

"RAILLERY," said Montesquieu, "is a way of speaking in favor of one's wit at the expense of one's better nature."

raiment (RAY-muhnt), noun

Clothing or apparel of the finest quality.

When Priscilla entered the room attired in RAIMENT of pure gold, her guests gasped and more than one glass of wine was overturned on silken tablecloths.

raison d'être (RAY-zohn-deh-truh), noun

The core reason why something exists; its central purpose and mission in this world.

When Jane's children went off to college, her RAISON D'ÊTRE disappeared, and she fell into a deep depression.

rambunctious (ram-BUHNGK-shuhss), adjective

Difficult to handle; wild and boisterous.

"The golden age, when RAMBUNCTIOUS spirits were regarded as the source of evil." – Friedrich Nietzsche, nineteenth-century German philosopher

ramification (ram-uh-fuh-KAY-shun), noun

A natural consequence of an action or circumstance.

A RAMIFICATION of a prolonged stay in low or zero gravity would be loss of bone mass and lean muscle.

rancor (RAYN-core), noun

Conflict between individuals or groups, usually resulting from disagreement over an action or issue, and accompanied by ill will, bad feelings, and an escalation of the dispute over time.

"They no longer assume responsibility (as beat cops used to do) for averting RANCOR between antagonistic neighbors." – Harlan Ellison, American author

rapacity (ruh-PAH-sih-tee), noun

Greed for wealth, power, fame, and success, even at the expense of others.

An unquenchable desire for the finer things in life is not RAPACITY, as some have suggested. It is, instead, a mark of higher birth.

rapprochement (rah-PROWCH-ment), noun

Re-establishment of friendly relations between nations following a period of hostility.

Lydia spoke at length about how RAPPROCHEMENT between the United States and some former Soviet nations has been a real boon to her family's prestige and wealth.

rarefied (RARE-uh-fyed), adjective

Lofty; exalted; of high class or caliber.

Most copywriters don't operate in the RAREFIED environment in which Clayton makes his millions.

ratiocinate (ray-shee-OSS-inn-ate), verb

To work toward the solution of a problem through logical thinking and reason.

Since the dawn of humanity, our best minds have failed to RATIOCINATE a method of proving God's existence.

raze (RAYZ), verb

To tear down or demolish.

We had to RAZE our Cape Cod home and rebuild it entirely, due to some structural damage to the home caused by high winds.

recalcitrant (rih-KAL-sih-trunt), adjective

Unwilling to cooperate voluntarily; hesitant to step forward and do what one is asked or told to do.

On the witness stand, the mobster was RECALCITRANT and uncommunicative.

recant (rih-KANT), verb

To withdraw or disavow formally.

"I cannot and will not RECANT anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe." – Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism

recapitulate (ree-kah-PIT-chew-late), verb

To repeat something, but in a more concise form.

"To RECAPITULATE: always be on time for my class," the professor told his freshman class on the first day of the semester.

recession (ree-SESH-in), noun

A troubled economy characterized by a decline in gross domestic product for two consecutive quarters; a period during which unemployment is on the rise, inflation is increasing, and consumer confidence and spending power is eroded.

The looming RECESSION has even hurt some of our families, who have had to let go of second yachts and one or two homes.

reciprocity (res-uh-PROS-ih-tee), noun

Doing business with—or a favor for—someone, because they have done a favor for, or bought from, you.

Giving customers free gifts increases sales because of the principle of RECIPROCITY.

recompense (REE-kum-pense), verb, noun

To give someone cash or something else of value to make up for injury or inconvenience they suffered at your hands, either accidentally or deliberately.

"To be remembered after we are dead, is but poor RECOMPENSE for being treated with contempt while we are living." – William Hazlitt, English literary critic and philosopher

recondite (REHK-un-dite), adjective

Beyond typical knowledge and understanding.

For most people, opera, polo, and fine wine remain RECONDITE subjects.

recriminate (rih-KRIM-uh-nayt), verb

To bring up accusations against someone who has accused you.

After Natasha was snubbed by us for blabbing to the gossip pages, she RECRIMINATED by pointing out that some of us had leaked gossip ourselves.

rectitude (REHK-ti-tood), noun

Moral virtue; rightness.

"The mind that's conscious of its RECTITUDE, / Laughs at the lies of rumor." – Ovid, Roman poet

recumbent (rih-KUHM-bent), adjective

Inactive, idle; lying down.

During our Italian cruise, we spent most of our time RECUMBENT on the bow of the yacht, soaking up the sun's rays.

recursive (ree-KURSS-iv), adjective

Pertaining to a process in which each step makes use of the results of the earlier steps.

The study of mathematics is a RECURSIVE learning experience.

redact (re-DAKT), verb

To edit a comment, thought, or written document before going public with it.

"You may want to REDACT your opinion on your opponent's health care policies," his campaign manager warned him.

redolent (RED-oh-lent), adjective

An object possessing a rich scent or alluring aroma, or a situation with a hint or promise of rich possibilities.

Her rose garden was REDOLENT with the perfume of a thousand flowers.

redoubtable (rih-DOW-tuh-bull), adjective

The quality of being a formidable opponent.

Michael's REDOUBTABLE nature made him a successful negotiator and trial attorney.

reflexive (reh-FLEK-siv), adjective

Something that happens through reflex rather than deliberate choice or effort.

We don't mean to act imperiously toward the nouveau riche; it's just a REFLEXIVE and conditioned response.

refulgent (rih-FUHL-jent), adjective

Radiant, gleaming; shining brightly.

When Anastasia moved her bejeweled hand while lounging in the midday sunshine, her sparkling diamonds were REFULGENT.

rejoinder (rih-JOIN-der), noun

A clever or witty reply to a question or comment.

Lydia's often catty REJOINDERS quickly made her the bane of our group.

remiss (rih-miss), adjective

Negligent or careless.

Our servants know that if they ever are REMISS in their duties, then we will quickly fire them.

remittance (ree-MITT-inss), noun

A payment for goods or services purchased on credit.

Lacking a credit card, he made a REMITTANCE on his account online using PayPal.

remonstrate (rih-MON-strate), verb

To protest, object, or to show disapproval.

When Carlotta REMONSTRATED our snubbing of Julia, we simply began to snub Carlotta as well.

remunerate (rih-MYOO-nuh-rate), verb

To settle a debt or other financial obligation by making a payment.

Peter's supervisor at the insurance company would do anything to avoid REMUNERATING policyholders for the claims they made.

renaissance (REN-ah-sonce), noun, adjective

A period of great learning, thinking, and creativity—in art, literature, science, economics, and philosophy.

We were so pleased by the RENAISSANCE of wealth acquisition that arose during the closing years of the twentieth century.

renunciation (ree-nun-see-AYE-shun), noun

To distance yourself from a position or belief; to publicly state a shift in ideals or position on an issue while criticizing your past stance as wrong.

"With RENUNCIATION life begins." – Amelia E. Barr, British novelist

reparations (reh-par-AYE-shins), noun

Payments made by nations defeated in war to the victors, who impose these payments to recover from some of the costs of battle.

After World War I, REPARATIONS of 132 billion gold marks were imposed on Germany by the French.

repartee (rep-er-TAY), noun

Conversation characterized by witty banter.

Our galas and balls are always marked by delightful REPARTEE around the grand dinner table.

repertoire (REH-per-tware), noun

A library of works that a group knows and regularly performs.

The philharmonic's REPERTOIRE includes most of the classical standards from Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mozart.

replete (rih-PLEET), adjective

Abundantly provided; complete.

> "The highway is REPLETE with culinary land mines disguised as quaint local restaurants that carry such reassuring names as Millie's, Pop's and Capt'n Dick's." – Bryan Miller, American food critic

repose (rih-POHZ), noun

To be in a position or state of rest.

> The wholesome relief, REPOSE, content; / And this bunch, pluck'd at random from myself; / It has done its work—I tossed it carelessly to fall where it may. – Walt Whitman, American poet and humanist

reprobate (REE-pro-bait), noun

A person who routinely commits illegal, immoral, or unethical acts without hesitation or remorse.

One reason that Anthony continues to be a REPROBATE is because his father, as well as his social contacts, keep bailing him out of jail.

reprove (ree-PROOV), verb

To criticize and correct others.

We found it necessary to REPROVE Elyssia for some of her questionable fashion choices.

repudiate (reh-pew-dee-AYTE), verb

To dispute an idea, decision, or belief; to distance oneself and refuse to be associated with someone or something.

We repeatedly REPUDIATED James for his assertion that Rolex watches surpass those of Cartier.

requisite (REK-wiz-it), noun or adjective

A mandatory action, requirement, or condition; or, necessary and mandatory.

Being physically fit is a REQUISITE to getting a job as a firefighter.

requite (rih-KWYTE), verb

To seek revenge for an actual or assumed wrong.

"… certain sets of human beings are very apt to maintain that other sets should give up their lives to them and their service, and then they REQUITE them by praise" – Charlotte Brönte, British novelist

rescind (ree-SINNED), verb

Take away, revoke, cancel, withdraw, remove.

Richard RESCINDED his order for a yacht, opting instead to purchase a private aircraft.

respite (RESS-pit), noun

A temporary delay from something distressing.

"Sweet Flower of Hope! free Nature's genial child! / That didst so fair disclose thy early bloom, / Filling the wide air with a rich perfume! / For thee in vain all heavenly aspects smiled; / From the hard world brief RESPITE could they win …" – Samuel Taylor Coleridge, English poet

resplendent (reh-SPLEN-dent), adjective

Garbed or decorated in lush fabrics and rich, vibrant colors.

The bride was RESPLENDENT in a beaded silk gown.

restive (RESS-tihv), adjective

Impatient and stubborn.

Audrey was so worked up about her first summer abroad that her excitement came across as RESTIVE.

reticent (REH-tih-scent), adjective

Reluctance to openly express one's thoughts, feelings, and personal business to other people; behaving like an introvert in social situations.

"The shorter poems tend to be RETICENT, psychologically acute love poems about the shifting inequalities of love." – Edward Mendelson, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Colombia University

retinue (RET-n-oo), noun

A group of people who follow an important person either because they desire to do so or because it is their job to do so.

A Secret Service RETINUE follows the President wherever he goes, twenty-four hours a day.

retort (rih-TORT), verb, noun

To reply in a sharp, retaliatory manner.

Carl had to bite back a sharp RETORT when Sallee criticized the couture gown his mother wore to the soiree.

retrograde (REH-trow-grayed), adjective

Reverting to an earlier state, condition, or style; harkening to an earlier time and place.

My favorite diner is decorated in a RETROGRADE art deco style.

revelry (REV-uhl-ree), noun

Boisterous festivity and merrymaking.

"Midnight shout and REVELRY, / Tipsy dance and jollity." – John Milton, English poet

rhetoric (REH-tore-ik), noun

Artful use of language to get other people to see your point of view; making a persuasive case more through persuasive speech or writing than with actual facts and evidence.

Plato called RHETORIC "the art of ruling the minds of men."

ribald (RIB-uld), adjective

Lewd; off-color; somewhat dirty and inappropriate.

"It is … useful to distinguish between the pornographic, condemned in every society, and the bawdy, the RIBALD, the shared vulgarities and jokes, which are the safety valves of most social systems." – Margaret Mead, American cultural anthropologist

rife (RIFE), adjective

Prevalent, abundant, abounding.

The hotel was RIFE with tourists, so we quickly went upstairs to the penthouse.

rigmarole (RIG-muh-roll), noun

Absurdly complicated procedures and instructions; a bunch of unnecessary baloney.

The club had some value to him in business, but he quickly grew tired of all the RIGMAROLE at meetings.

riposte (rih-POST), noun

A quick, often witty or cutting, response to a comment or question.

Eileen was unable to offer one of her usual RIPOSTES when we descried her decision to eschew the season's fashion.

risible (RIZZ-uh-bull), adjective

Capable of causing laughter due to its ludicrous nature.

Janine's decision to summer in the Hamptons instead of on the French Riviera was deemed RISIBLE by the rest of us.

roisterers (ROY-stir-ers), noun

Partiers, celebrators, or an individual or group having a good time in a loud and boisterous manner.

The ROISTERERS' enjoyment of the party was so infectious, their neighbors joined them instead of complaining about the noise.

roué (roo-AY), noun

A dissolute man in fashionable society; a rake.

"A pretty wife is something for the fastidious vanity of a ROUÉ to retire upon." – Thomas Moore, Irish poet and songwriter

rubric (ROO-brick), noun

A class, category, title, or heading.

We decided to place Natasha's ball gown under the RUBRIC of "failed fashion choices."

rue (ROO), verb

To repent of and regret bitterly.

Elliott knew he would RUE the day that he decided to sell his Maserati, but he did so at his father's urging.

rumination (ROO-muh-nay-shun), noun

The act of thinking about something in great detail, weighing the pros and cons over and over in your mind.

For busy people under stress, RUMINATION after going to bed is a frequent contributor to insomnia.

ruritanian (roor-ih-TAYNE-ee-in), adjective

Anything related to a romantic adventure or its environment.

The two lovers found Barbados to be a RURITANIAN paradise.

“It is natural to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes to that SIREN until she ‘allures’ us to our death.”

Gertrude Stein, American author

S

sacrilegious (sack-reh-LIIH-juss), adjective

Openly insulting or disrespectful to the beliefs, religion, ideas, and practices of others—especially the ones they hold most sacred.

Bryson's insistence that Miró is more collectible that Warhol is positively SACRILEGIOUS.

sacrosanct (SACK-roh-sankt), adjective

Beyond criticism because it is considered sacred.

"If men could get pregnant, maternity benefits would be as SACROSANCT as the G.I. Bill." – Letty Cottin Pogrebin. American editor and writer

sagacity (suh-GASS-ih-tee), noun

Wisdom; soundness of judgment.

"Our minds are endowed by nature with such activity and SAGACITY that the soul is believed to be produced from heaven." – Quintilian, Roman rhetorician

salacious (suh-LAY-shuss), adjective

Having an unhealthy, obsessive, or addictive interest in sex.

For weeks, the society pages were rife with SALACIOUS gossip, which turned out to originate from Mallory, who had lost her beau to Jeannette.

salient (SALE-yent), adjective

Relevant; germane; important; something that stands out and gets noticed.

The pond in the front yard is the most SALIENT feature of our new home.

salubrious (suh-LOO-bree-us), adjective

Favorable to one's health.

After father's asthma reasserted itself, the family began to spend more time at its Arizona compound due to the area's dry weather, which is SALUBRIOUS toward asthmatics.

salutary (SAL-you-tar-ee), adjective

To have a soothing or healing effect; an act that helps one recover or benefit from a situation.

Tuberculosis patients were often sent to the mountains, where the fresh air was thought to have a SALUTARY effect on their condition.

sanctimonious (sank-tih-MOAN-ee-us), adjective

Overbearingly self-righteous and smug in the (perhaps mistaken) belief that one's opinion is correct, and possessing an air of moral superiority about one's opinion.

> "Not but I've every reason not to care / What happens to him if it only takes / Some of the SANCTIMONIOUS conceit / Out of one of those pious scalawags." – Robert Frost, American poet

sangfroid (san-FWAH), noun

The attitude or state of possessing a cool head and steadfast composure in the face of danger, adversity, or stressful situations.

The car crash shook him, but within seconds he recovered his SANGFROID and went to check on his driver.

sanguine (SANG-gwihn), adjective

Accepting of circumstances with good cheer and a positive attitude.

"Many marketers were SANGUINE about the Do Not Call introduction, saying that it helped better focus their

telephone communications." – Eleanor Trickett, DM News editor

sapient (SAY-pee-ent), adjective

Wise.

The judge made a SAPIENT ruling in splitting custody between the two parents.

sardonic (sar-DON-ik), adjective

Mean-spirited sarcasm.

When I asked the bank for another home equity loan, the president, who was called out of his office by the teller, approached with a SARDONIC grin.

sartorial (sar-TOR-ee-al), adjective

Anything related to the way a person dresses, typically used to describe a man who wears finely tailored clothing.

Jonathan's personal tailor always makes sure that Jonathan radiates SARTORIAL splendor.

satiety (suh-TIE-ih-tee), noun

The sensation or feeling of being full or having eaten too much.

Although we knew we would be struck by SATIETY, we could not resist the gustatory delights offered at the Whittington's New Year's gala.

saturnine (SAT-ur-neen), adjective

Moody; morose; gloomy; unhappy; having a pessimistic outlook on life.

Ever since his father told him he could not have another Lotus Esprit, Williams has acted positively SATURNINE.

satyr (SAY-ter), noun

A lascivious, lecherous man.

Harold's graceful manners disappear once he has had a few glasses of champagne, and he becomes a veritable SATYR.

savant (sah-VANT), noun

A person with a natural talent or genius in a particular field or skill.

With her family's background in finance, it was a given that Francine would be a Wall Street SAVANT.

savoir faire (SAV-wahr-FAIR), noun

An evident sense of confidence, optimism, and proficiency in the task at hand.

Eileen hosted a charity luncheon for forty people with her usual SAVOIR FAIRE.

scarify (SKARE-ih-fie), verb

To wound with harsh criticism.

We deemed it necessary to SCARIFY Eileen for having the nerve to criticize our fashion sense.

scintilla (SIN-tih-lah), noun

A spark; a tiny trace amount.

"The air twittered with bright SCINTILLAS of fading light." – Harlan Ellison, American author

scion (SIGH-uhn), noun

A descendant or heir.

"SCION of chiefs and monarchs, where art thou? / Fond hope of many nations, art thou dead?" –Lord Byron, British Romantic poet

sectarian (sek-TAYR-ee-in), adjective

Relating to the practices, nature, or activities of a sect.

"In the early 1990s, as the insurgency took on a more unambiguously religious and SECTARIAN flavor, several Pandits were killed, and most of the rest fled for their lives." – William Dalrymple, Scottish historian and author

secular (SEK-yuh-lehr), adjective

Separate from or devoid of religious belief or connotation.

"The liberal humanist assumption that American society, like that of Europe, would become progressively SECULAR was always something of a delusion." – Gordon Wood, History Professor at Brown University

sedentary (SEHD-n-tare-ee), adjective

Resting a great deal and taking little exercise.

All we have to do is hire a personal trainer if our SEDENTARY habits begin to have negative effects on our well-being.

sedition (sih-DISH-uhn), noun

An action that promotes discontent or rebellion.

In an act of childish SEDITION, Alex quit the club after we refused to play a round of golf with him.

sentient (SEN-tea-ent), adjective

Possessing enough intelligence to be self aware.

"Many years ago, a particular creature was selected to develop into the dominant life form on this planet. It was given certain breaks and certain challenges, all of which, when utilized or overcome, marked it indelibly with particular traits as it moved along the road to a higher SENTIENCE." – Roger Zelazny, American science fiction writer

separatists (SEP-prah-tists), noun

Those who believe a particular region or group should be separated from a larger whole.

Some SEPARATIST Canadians want Quebec to be a separate nation from the rest of Canada.

sepulchral (suh-PUHL-kruhl), adjective

Hollow and deep; characteristic of a tomb; often used to describe certain voices.

Our butler's SEPULCHRAL voice instantly impresses our social contacts when they come to visit.

sequester (see-KWESS-ter), verb

To remove and isolate a portion from a larger whole.

"A great deal of genetic engineering must be done before we have carbon-eaters SEQUESTING carbon in sufficient quantity to counteract the burning of fossil fuels." – Freeman Dyson, English-born American physicist and mathematician

serendipity (ser-en-DIP-it-ee), noun

Attaining success, good fortune, or the object of your desire more through luck and random circumstance than deliberate effort.

What made him an Internet billionaire was SERENDIPITY more than brains or talent.

serpentine (SUR-pen-teen), adjective

Snake-like in shape or movement.

"For it is not possible to join SERPENTINE wisdom with columbine innocency, except men know exactly all the conditions of the serpent." – Francis Bacon, English philosopher, author, and statesman

sesquipedalian (ses-kwi-pih-DAL-yin), adjective

A writer or speaker who prefers big, complex words and arcane jargon to plain, simple English, or a piece of writing containing such prose.

"Recently a strange whimsy has started to creep in among the SESQUIPEDALIAN prose of scientific journals." – Stephen Hall, American architect

sidereal (SIGH-der-eel), adjective

Determined by outside forces, particularly the positions of the stars and planets in the evening sky.

"Thoughts give birth to a creative force that is neither elemental nor SIDEREAL." – Philippus Paracelsus, Swiss alchemist, astrologer, and physician

sinecure (SIN-eh-KYOOR), noun

A job or office without regular duties but with regular pay; a position requiring minimal labor but conveying prestige or status to one who holds it.

Being elected as the new president of his trade association bestowed on Bill some much-needed SINECURE.

siren (SY-ren), noun

A destructive, but seductively beautiful, beguiling woman; or, anything considered dangerously seductive.

"It is natural to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes to that SIREN until she 'allures' us to our death." – Gertrude Stein, American author

soi-disant (soy-dih-SAHNT), adjective

Self-styled.

A SOI-DISANT lady's man, Gary's focus was always on his next conquest.

sojourn (SO-jern), noun

A temporary visit or stay.

The Israelites' SOJOURN in the desert lasted for forty long years.

solidarity (sol-ih-DARE-ih-tee), noun

Bonding of people to others because of shared interests, beliefs, goals, or attitudes.

"It was the middle-class female SOLIDARITY, defending a nice girl from charges of calculation and viciousness." – Saul Bellow, American author

soliloquy (suh-LIL-ih-kwee), noun

A dramatic or literary form of speaking in which a character reveals his innermost thoughts when he is alone or thinks he is alone.

The most famous SOLILOQUY in all of literature is the "To be or not to be" speech in Hamlet.

solipsism (SAHL-ip-sihz-uhm), noun

The notion that one's own experiences and thoughts are the only source of true knowledge.

The SOLIPSISM of some members of the leisure class is distasteful to those of us who, for example, know what our servants need even more than they do.

solstice (SOUL-stis), noun

A day of the year during which the sun is at its highest or lowest point in the sky, causing the shortest day of the year on December 21 (winter solstice) and the longest day of the year on June 21 (summer solstice).

We open our lake house for the summer season every year at the SOLSTICE.

sonorous (SON-er-russ), adjective

A deep, rich, resonant sound.

The b-flat bass saxophone is the most SONOROUS member of the saxophone family, with the baritone saxophone coming in a close second.

sophist (SAHF-ist), adjective

Sounding reasonable, yet patently false.

One can argue that what is learned in law school is largely the skill of making SOPHIST arguments that a jury can believe.

soporific (sop-uh-RIFF-ick), adjective

Something so boring, tedious, or exhausting that it makes one start to fall asleep.

If Cassandra weren't such an important social contact, her SOPORIFIC speech would surely cause us to avoid her.

specious (SPEE-shus), adjective

Something that appears correct on the surface, but is in fact wrong.

The judge summarily rejected the SPECIOUS arguments put forth by the defendant, which seemed to have no evidence to back them up.

spoonerism (SPOON-er-iz-um), noun

A phrase in which the syllables of neighboring words are accidentally interchanged.

A popular SPOONERISM states: "Cook a grilled cheese sandwich in lots of butter, let it get cold, and you have a chilled grease sandwich."

Sphinx (SFINKS), noun

A mythical creature with the head of a woman, the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle, and the tail of a serpent.

When Oedipus correctly answered the SPHINX'S riddle, the SPHINX leaped to its death in the valley below.

spurious (SPYOOR-ee-us), adjective

False; inauthentic; not well thought out.

Every week I get SPURIOUS accusations of being a spammer even though my list is entirely double opt-in.

stagnation (stag-NAY-shin), noun

The condition of being inactive or the slowing of forward progress or lessening of activity.

"Economists' statistical techniques are not refined enough to analyze unambiguously the causes of this long-term STAGNATION." – Jeff Madrick, director of policy research at the Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis, The New School.

staid (STAYD), adjective

Fixed and settled; not distinctive; uninteresting.

Even though the Sandersons are an important family, we could hardly last the requisite hour at the family's STAID winter ball.

stalwart (STAL-wart), noun, adjective

A loyal, reliable member of an organization; a staunch supporter of a group or cause.

Although Wayne is no longer a working engineer, he is a STALWART member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers.

stoicism (STOH-ih-si-zum), noun

Enduring pain or suffering without complaining.

"He soldiered through his duties with what looked like cheerful STOICISM." – Thomas Pynchon, American author

stolid (STAHL-id), adjective

Unemotional and impassive.

Thomas's STOLID demeanor hides the heart of a jet-setting playboy.

stringent (STRIHN-juhnt), adjective

Rigorous, strict, severe.

"No laws, however STRINGENT, can make the idle industrious, the thriftless provident, or the drunken sober." – Samuel Smiles, Scottish author and reformer

strophe (STROF), noun
A stanza containing lines that do not conform to the type, style, or form of the poem in which they appear.
Those not wearing haute couture stick out at our gatherings like STROPHES stick out in short poems.

stultify (STUHL-tuh-fie), verb
To cause to appear foolish or ridiculous.
The out-of-date chapeau absolutely STULTIFIED Heather's otherwise immaculate couture.

stygian (STY-gee-an), adjective
Eerily quiet, so dark as to be almost pitch black.

"STAND close around, ye STYGIAN set, / With Dirce in one boat convey'd! / Or Charon, seeing, may forget / That he is old and she a shade" – Walter Savage Landor, British writer and poet

subjugation (sub-jih-GAY-shun), noun
The process of making someone your inferior and requiring them to take orders from you.
"There was a flavor of SUBJUGATION in his love for Madeleine." – Saul Bellow, American author

sublime (suh-BLYME), adjective
Reaching new levels of quality and perfection unduplicated elsewhere; of such immense beauty that the viewer's breath is taken away, metaphorically speaking.
"The SUBLIME and the ridiculous are often so nearly related, that it is difficult to class them separately. One step above the SUBLIME makes the ridiculous, and one step above the ridiculous makes the SUBLIME again." – Thomas Paine, English revolutionary and intellectual

subliminal (sub-LIM-inn-uhl), adjective
Operating below the threshold of consciousness, but still having an affect on the mind.
SUBLIMINAL advertising was a big fad in advertising in the 1970s.

subrogation (suh-bro-GAY-shin), noun
The substitution of one person for another with respect to a lawful claim or right.
The SUBROGATION clause in the lease says that if the landlord cannot collect rent from the tenant, she has the right to collect from the co-signer of the leasing agreement.

subsistence (SUB-sis-tense), noun
The minimum—of food, water, clothing, shelter, and money—a person or family needs to survive.
All we need for SUBSISTENCE is the basics: the finest of everything.

subversive (sub-VER-siv), adjective
Describes an act performed to challenge or overthrow the authority of those in power.
"If sex and creativity are often seen by dictators as SUBVERSIVE activities, it's because they lead to the knowledge that you own your own body." – Erica Jong, American author and teacher

suffrage (SUF-rij), noun
The right to vote in political elections.

"Higginson was an early advocate of women's SUFFRAGE as he was a vociferous advocate of civil rights for Negroes." – Joyce Carol Oates, American author

sultry (SUL-tree), adjective

In terms of weather, hot and humid, with little or no breeze. In terms of human behavior, suggestive of passion or smoldering sexuality.

"Bare-headed in the SULTRY sun, Ahab stood on the bowsprit." – Herman Melville, American author

supercilious (sue-per-SILL-ee-us), adjective

Feeling superior to others, and as a result, having a low opinion of or contempt for them based on your belief that they are inferior.

Too many get-rich-quick promoters imbue their advertisements with a SUPERCILIOUS attitude toward the wealth seekers they profess to wanting to help.

superfluous (soo-PER-flew-us), adjective

Excessive and unnecessary.

Some people never seem to be aware that wearing more than a hint of fine jewelry is SUPERFLUOUS.

superlative (sue-PURR-lah-tiv), adjective

The quality of something's being the best in its class or quality.

Our family's show horses are SUPERLATIVE to the rest of the horses one can find in the county.

supersede (sue-per-SEED), verb

When one thing takes the place of another or renders the former obsolete.

"The classical laws [of physics] were SUPERSEDED by quantum laws." – Stephen Hawking, British theoretical physicist

supplant (suh-PLANT), verb

To take the place of.

"If we would SUPPLANT the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and arguments so clear, that even their great authority fairly considered and weighted, cannot stand." – Abraham Lincoln

surfeit (SUR-fit), noun

Having too much of a good thing, especially generous servings of food and drink.

"A SURFEIT of the sweetest things / The deepest loathing to the stomach brings." – William Shakespeare

surreal (suh-REEL), adjective

Possessing a quality that makes something seem unreal; strange; bizarre; almost other-worldly.

"He seemed to toss them all into the mixed salads of his poetry with the same indifference to form and logic, the same domesticated SURREALISM, that characterized much of the American avant-garde of the period." – Frank O'Hara, American poet

surreptitious (suh-rep-TISH-us), adjective

Done in secret.

With little more than SURREPTITIOUS glances, Alison was able to entice Quentin to her side at the spring gala.

susurration (soo-suh-RAY-shun), noun

A soft sound such as the murmuring from a hushed conversation in the next room or the rain gently falling on the roof.

He bought a device to help him sleep: an electronic synthesizer that mimics the SUSURRATION of a drizzle or a rainstorm.

suzerainty (suh-ZER-ant-tee), noun

Paramount, unquestioned authority.

"The account executives are sufficiently mature to manage every phase of their accounts without challenging the ultimate SUZERAINTY of the copywriter." – David Ogilvy, British advertising executive

sybaritic (sih-bar-IT-ik), adjective

Relating to self-indulgent sensuous luxury and pleasure.

Selena rubbed the suntan lotion over her tanned middle slowly, and the whole thing had an erotic, SYBARITIC quality that made the men's eyes pop out of their heads.

sycophant (SIK-uh-fuhnt), noun

A person attempting to get on your good side by constantly sucking up and flattering you.

Outwardly polite, the rock star secretly viewed his fans as slobbering SYCOPHANTS.

symbiosis (sim-bee-OH-sis), noun

A close interdependency between two organisms from two different species.

The nouveau riche would like to believe they have a SYMBIOSIS with us, but, in fact, they remain wholly separate and distinct.

synchronous (SIN-kro-nus), adjective

Two events or processes that take place at the same time.

The Smythingtons and the Lyttons caused quite a stir among their social contacts after they scheduled SYNCHRONOUS galas.

syncopation (sin-ko-PAY-shun), noun

Music in which the beats are reversed: the normally loud beats are softer, and the beats normally subdued are emphasized.

The weird SYNCOPATION in the score made the music very difficult for the percussionists to follow.

syncretistic (sin-kre-TIH-stik), adjective

A set of beliefs obtained by combining elements of multiple cultures, religions, societies, or schools of thought.

Pauline's SYNCRETISTIC worldview comes from the fact that her family has traveled extensively across the globe.

synecdoche (sih-NECK-duh-kee), noun

A type of shorthand speech in which a partial description is understood by the reader or listener to represent the whole; e.g., saying "New York" in a discussion of baseball when you mean "the New York Yankees."

Marla could not stop using a SYNECDOCHE after she returned from her trip to England at which she met the royal family, saying repeatedly that she had met and socialized with "the crown."

synoptic (sin-OP-tik), adjective

Forming or involving a synopsis or summary.

The close of a presentation should be SYNOPTIC in nature.

systemic (sih-STEM-ik), adjective

Relating to a system as a whole and not just its component parts.

The discarding of couture clothing that is less than a year old has become SYSTEMIC among our group.

syzygy (SIZE-ih-gee), noun

In astronomy, syzygy takes place when the Earth, sun, and moon all line up along a straight path.

Astronomers predict an eclipse for the next SYZYGY.

“To the artist is sometimes granted
a sudden, TRANSIENT insight
which serves in this matter for
experience. A flash, and where
previously the brain held a dead
fact, the soul grasps a living truth!
At moments we are all artists.”

Arnold Bennett, English novelist

T

tableau (tah-BLOW), noun

A memorable scene created by the grouping of objects and people.

When Jeannette walked into the room, the TABLEAU of angry faces that greeted her revealed that we knew it was she who had gossiped to the society pages.

tabula rasa (TAB-yuh-luh-RAH-suh), noun

A clean slate; lacking preconceived notions, prejudices, beliefs, and attitudes; receptive to instruction and information.

"Classic writer's fear of the blank page: call it TABULA RASA-phobia." – John Jerome, American nonfiction writer

taciturn (TAH-sih-turn), adjective

Reserved; uncommunicative; a person of few words.

"Nature is garrulous to the point of confusion, let the artist be truly TACITURN." – Paul Klee, German-born Swiss painter

tactile (TACK-tile), adjective

Related to the sense of touch.

This year's Parisian couture is distinguished by its use of highly TACTILE fabrics.

tangential (tan-JEHN-shull), adjective

Divergent or digressive; having little to do with the subject or matter at hand.

"New York is full of people … with a feeling for the TANGENTIAL adventure, the risky adventure, the interlude that's not likely to end in any double-ring ceremony." – Joan Didion, American journalist

tantamount (TAN-tuh-mount), adjective

Equivalent in value or effect.

Eleanor considered our snub of her TANTAMOUNT to betrayal and, in truth, she was correct.

tantric (TAN-trik), adjective

Anything related to the school of thought that views sex as a sacred and deeply spiritual act.

"Both religions [Hinduism and Buddhism] were patronized by the same kings, ministers, and merchants, many of whom indulged in the same TANTRIC heterodoxies." – William Dalrymple, Scottish historian and author

tautology (taw-TAHL-uh-jee), noun

A statement, principle, or phrase repeated many times in different ways for emphasis and resulting in redundancy.

After his wealthy father's death, Gerald consistently referred to his mother with the TAUTOLOGY, "widow woman."

tawdry (TAW-dree), adjective

Gaudy, showy, and cheap, as clothes; or, base and mean, as motives.

"Far from being the basis of the good society, the family, with its narrow privacy and TAWDRY secrets, is the source of all our discontents." – Sir Edmund Leach, British author

teem (TEEM), verb

To abound or swarm.

As we walked into the nightclub, the paparazzi TEEMED around us like so many manic worker bees.

teleological (tee-lee-uh-LOJ-ik-uhl), adjective

The notion that things exist for a purpose.

The fact that we have unsurpassable wealth and taste, while others who are less important endure hardship, is surely proof that we live in a TELEOLOGICAL universe.

temerity (teh-MER-ih-tee), noun

Possessing of boldness and confidence perhaps unwarranted by the situation at hand.

Anne, the girl who just moved to our gated community, had the TEMERITY to ask if we would invite her to one of our galas.

temper (TEHM-per), verb

To moderate or lessen the impact of.

"Yet I shall TEMPER so / Justice with mercy." – John Milton, English poet

temperance (TEM-per-ance), noun

Abstinence from consuming alcoholic beverages.

Cicero said that TEMPERANCE is "the firm and moderate dominion of reason over passion and other unrighteous impulses of the mind."

tempestuous (tem-PESS-chew-us), adjective

Tumultuous and turbulent, as a personality.

Claire's TEMPESTUOUS personality is most likely linked to the fact that her father has married and remarried an excessive amount.

temporal (tem-PORE-uhl), adjective

Relating to time.

"Science is the language of the TEMPORAL world; love is that of the spiritual world." – Honoré de Balzac, French novelist and playwright

temporize (TEHM-puh-rize), verb

To gain time by being evasive or indecisive.

When an officious socialite tries to get too close to us, we do not feel the need to TEMPORIZE with our response; we simply remind her of her place.

tenacious (tuh-NAY-shuss), adjective

Persistent, stubborn, obstinate.

"Women are TENACIOUS, and all of them should be TENACIOUS of respect; without esteem they cannot exist; esteem is the first demand that they make of love." – Honoré de Balzac, French novelist and playwright

tendentious (ten-DEN-she-us), adjective

Describes statements or actions designed to promote one's beliefs or point of view.

Laura is TENDENTIOUS in her efforts to prove that she believes that a plentitude of fine jewelry is the key to happiness.

tenebrous (TEN-uh-bruss), adjective

Dark and gloomy.

Eloise and Marcus spent the day exploring the TENEBROUS forest that surrounded their family's Maine compound.

tenet (TEH-net), noun

A central philosophy; a core belief; a rule or principle one lives by.

"Christian writers from the third century on pointed out the deleterious effect of Platonism on Christian belief—even while adopting many of its fundamental TENETS." – Harold Attridge, Dean of Yale University Divinity School

tenuous (TEN-you-us), adjective
Unsubstantiated and weak.
Roland's arguments to prove to us that it's better to give than to receive were TENUOUS at best.

tepid (TEHP-id), adjective
Characterized by a lack of enthusiasm.
We greeted the new opera, with its mawkish plot and poor acting, with TEPID applause.

tête-à-tête (TET-ah-tet), noun
A face-to-face meeting.
Some of us had begun to believe that our servants were pilfering from us, so we sat down the allegedly guilty parties and had a TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

thaumaturge (THAW-mah-turj), noun
A person who works miracles.
If you were ever to see Hannah early in the morning, just after she has awoken, then you would know her personal make-up artist is the epitome of a THAUMATURGE.

theocracy (thee-AH-krah-see), noun
A system of government in which priests rule in the name of God.
The Vatican is the ultimate THEOCRACY.

tincture (TINK-cherr), noun
A trace amount or slight tinge.
The tragic opera was leavened with a TINCTURE of comic relief.

titillate (TIT-l-ate), verb
To excite in an agreeable way.
With its stirring performance of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony, the full orchestra TITILLATED us at the Van Gelder's gala.

titular (TITCH-uh-luhr), adjective
A person who is a leader by title only, but lacks any real power.
The Queen is the TITULAR head of the British empire.

tombolo (TOM-bo-low), noun
A split that joins an offshore island to the mainland.
Until they decide to build a bridge, the single-lane road on the TOMBOLO is the only way on to and off of the island.

tome (TOAM), noun
A large or scholarly book.
"She carries a book but it is not / the TOME of the ancient wisdom, / the pages, I imagine, are the blank pages / of the unwritten volume of the new." – Hilda Doolittle, American poet and memoirist

toothsome (TOOTH-suhm), adjective
Voluptuous and sexually alluring.
Dorienne is TOOTHSOME thanks mainly to her plastic surgeon and her family's attractive fortune.

topical (TOP-ih-kuhl), adjective

Having to do with issues of current or local interest.

All the debutantes at the ball wasted our time with inane attempts at TOPICAL conversation about politics and other distasteful matters.

topography (tuh-POG-ruh-fee), noun

The arrangement of the physical features of a place, area, or physical object; the "lay of the land."

After her return from Europe, Lauren spent most of her time talking about the dazzling alpine TOPOGRAPHY of Switzerland.

torpor (TORE-purr), noun

Apathy; indifference.

> "A multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage TORPOR." – William Wordsworth, British Romantic poet

torrid (TORE-ihd), adjective

Ardent and passionate.

The TORRID romance between Alison and her family's stable boy lasted only a short time before the family discovered the tryst and fired the young man.

tort (TORT), noun

In law, a civil misdeed requiring compensation of the victims.

Cutting the branches off a neighbor's tree that went over the fence into your yard is, at most, a TORT, not a felony.

tortuous (TORE-chew-us), adjective

Intricate and indirect; not straightforward.

> "[Critics] don't know that it is hard to write a good play, and twice as hard and TORTUOUS to write a bad one." – Anton Chekhov, Russian dramatist

totem (TOH-tuhm), noun

Anything that serves as a venerated symbol.

Our various formal and informal gardens are TOTEMS to our emphasis on the importance of the natural world.

tout (TOWT), verb

To publicize in a boastful, extravagant manner.

Eloise TOUTED the excellence of her family's new personal chef to a gauche and distasteful degree.

tractable (TRACK-tuh-bull), adjective

Easy going; easily managed.

The occasional kind comment seems rather enough to keep our servants TRACTABLE.

tractate (TRAK-tayt), noun

A treatise.

Amanda's mother delivered a TRACTATE to her daughter about socializing with the right people after she learned that Amanda had been spending time with middle-class families.

traduce (truh-DOOSS), verb

To speak maliciously of; slander.

We have snubbed Katrina permanently because she has, at one time or another, TRADUCED each one of us in the society pages.

transcendent (tran-SEN-dent), adjective

Going beyond normal everyday experience; existing beyond the known physical universe and its limitations.

"Genius … means the TRANSCENDENT capacity of taking trouble." – Thomas Carlyle, Scottish satirist and historian

transfiguration (trans-fig-yuh-RAY-shun), noun

An extreme change in appearance; a metamorphosis.

By the time of her coming out party, Brigitte had undergone a TRANSFIGURATION from gawky child to poised and beautiful adolescent.

transgress (trans-GRESS), verb

To go beyond acceptable bounds.

"Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we TRANSGRESS them at once?" – Henry David Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

transient (TRAN-shunt), adjective

Temporary; lacking permanence.

"To the artist is sometimes granted a sudden, TRANSIENT insight which serves in this matter for experience. A flash, and where previously the brain held a dead fact, the soul grasps a living truth! At moments we are all artists." – Arnold Bennett, English novelist

transmogrify (trans-MOG-ruh-fie), verb

To change appearance in a disturbing way.

We cannot abide that particular interior decorator because he always manages to TRANSMOGRIFY tasteful displays of luxury into pompous tableaus of arrogant wealth.

transubstantiation (tran-sub-STAN-she-aye-shun), noun

The notion of endowing something with symbolic value beyond its physical construct.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION is used as a technique in marketing, transforming shabby and gauche items into supposed examples of tasteful luxury.

travail (truh-VAIL), noun, verb

Pain and suffering due to a mental or physical hardship; or, to endure such pain and suffering.

Charlotte recently had to endure the TRAVAIL of going an entire week without her family's Olympic-sized swimming pool because the pool had developed a crack.

treacle (TREE-kuhl), noun

Contrived or mawkish sentimentality.

That writer's work is suffering in quality, as we could hardly sit through the TREACLE of her recently opened opera.

tremulous (TREHM-yuh-luss), adjective

Timid and fearful.

With TREMULOUS mien, Anthony asked Gwendolyn if she would consent to a joining of their families.

trenchant (TREN-chunt), adjective

Sarcastic; direct and to the point; intelligently analytical and accurate.

Michael's TRENCHANT commentary on American politics and society have made him a popular radio talk show host.

triptych (TRIP-tick), noun

A picture or carving on three panels, or a set of three associated paintings or other works of art.

Scott wanted to buy just the center painting, but the gallery owner refused to break up the TRIPTYCH.

Triton (TRY-ton), noun

A mythical creature, similar to a mermaid, with a human torso and arms, gills under the ears, and a tail like a dolphin.

TRITONS served Neptune as his attendants.

troglodyte (TRAHG-lah-dyte), noun

A person considered to be primitive, out of date, coarse, uncouth, ill-mannered, or brutish.

Sick and tired of going out with TROGLODYTES, Janet told her friends she was through with blind dates.

tropism (TRO-prizm), noun

The tendency of a plant or other organism to change direction in response to a stimulus; also used as a pejorative to describe reflexive or instinctual (i.e., mindless) human behavior.

The socialites demonstrate TROPISM as they flocked to the newly opened store of the newest high-fashion designer.

truckle (TRUHK-uhl), verb

To submit obsequiously to a command.

We have trained our servants to TRUCKLE to our every whim.

truculent (TRUK-you-lent), adjective

Belligerent; argumentative; always ready for a fight.

Short-tempered and TRUCULENT, Lucy could be set off by the slightest incident or comment.

trumpery (TRUHM-puh-ree), noun

Something without value; a trifle.

The TRUMPERY that the Smythingtons collect and call "art" is, clearly, distasteful dreck.

truncate (TRUN-kate), verb

To shorten something by cutting off the top or one of the ends.

Ellen looked ridiculous because she had chosen to TRUNCATE her floor-length party dress to tea-length hem.

tryst (TRIST), noun

An appointment made by lovers to meet at a certain place and time.

Since their families are of equal station, no one worries much about the supposedly secret TRYSTS between Josephine and Brock.

tumescent (too-MESS-ent), adjective

Becoming or already engorged, full, swollen, or rigid.

After the hurricane, our Florida compound was flooded by the TUMESCENT intra-coastal waterway.

tumid (TOO-mid), adjective

Pompous and swollen with pride.

We cannot stand it when Katherine wins arguments about couture and art collecting because the TUMID expression that crosses her face after a conversational victory is so loathsome.

turgescent (tur-JESS-ent), adjective
Becoming or appearing swollen or distended.
His abs were so neglected, his stomach became TURGESCENT after a big meal.

tyro (TIE-roh), noun
A beginner or novice.
Though a TYRO, Madeline quickly mastered cross-country skiing during her jaunt to Switzerland.

“A gentleman doesn’t pounce … he glides. If a woman sits on a piece of furniture which permits your sitting beside her, you are free to regard this as an invitation, though not an UNEQUIVOCAL one.”

Quentin Crisp, British writer, actor, and model

U

ubiquitous (you-BICK-wih-tuss), adjective
Something that is everywhere, all around you, constantly surrounding you, and you cannot escape from it.
Wireless communication in the United States became UBIQUITOUS toward the close of the twentieth century.

ulterior (uhl-TEER-ee-er), adjective
Intentionally concealed, as motives.

> "When one has extensively pondered about men, as a career or as a vocation, one sometimes feels nostalgic for primates. At least they do not have ULTERIOR motives." – Albert Camus, Algerian-born French author and philosopher

umbra (UM-brah), noun
A planet's shadow, especially the shadow of the Earth upon the moon.
A solar eclipse is caused by the Earth passing through the moon's UMBRA upon the sun.

umbrage (UM-bridge), noun
To take exception to and be offended by a comment or action seen as a slight or insult.
"I take UMBRAGE with people who post comments on my blog that are patently false," Bob said.

unassuming (uhn-uh-SOOM-ing), adjective
Modest and unpretentious.
The Binghamton's just bought a lovely, UNASSUMING 5,000 square-foot chalet in the Rockies.

unbridled (un-BRY-duld), adjective
Without limitations or boundaries; uncontrolled and unrestrained.
The customer's UNBRIDLED fury at being denied a refund was a sight to behold.

unceremonious (un-sair-uh-MOAN-ee-us), adjective
Discourteously abrupt, hasty, rude.
The maître d's UNCEREMONIOUS manner only made us love the new French restaurant all the more.

unctuous (UNK-chew-us), adjective
Possessing an untrustworthy or dubious nature; characterized by an insincere manner.
Local car dealers doing their own TV commercials often communicate in an UNCTUOUS, almost laughable manner.

undulate (UN-jew-late), intransitive verb
To move back and forth or from side to side in a smooth, slow motion.
Barbara and Bentley UNDULATED gracefully at their family's private ice rink.

unequivocal (uhn-ih-KWIV-uh-kull), adjective
Possessing a clear meaning or answer.
"A gentleman doesn't pounce … he glides. If a woman sits on a piece of furniture which permits your sitting beside her, you are free to regard this as an invitation, though not an UNEQUIVOCAL one." – Quentin Crisp, British writer, actor, and model

ungainly (un-GAIN-lee), adjective
Awkward and clumsy.
One of the hallmarks of this year's fashionable shoes is that they make one seem UNGAINLY on anything other

than marble flooring.

uniformitarianism (you-ni-form-ih-TARE-ee-uhn-izm), noun

The belief that change on Earth takes place slowly, gradually, and at a uniform rate rather than through short, sudden, catastrophic events.

The fact that the families of our servants have been with us for many, many generations would seem to be proof of UNIFORMITARIANISM.

unilateral (you-nhi-LAT-ur-uhl), adjective

A decision that affects many people or states, but that is made independently by a single authority, without consulting those whom it affects.

We made a UNILATERAL decision to exclude Edwin from our group of possible paramours due to his distasteful habit of kissing and telling.

unimpeachable (un-ihm-PEE-chuh-bull), adjective

Above reproach; impossible to discredit or slander.

We promoted Carla to upstairs maid because her job performance has been UNIMPEACHABLE.

unitary (YOU-ni-tare-ee), adjective

A thing that exists or occurs in discrete units, sections, parts, or steps.

"Today we can see life as a UNITARY process, made up of a number of smaller processes." – Julian Huxley, English evolutionary biologist

unsavory (un-SAYV-err-ee), adjective

Distasteful; unpleasant; disreputable; of dubious reputation.

"Our future is inextricably linked to what happens in Washington DC, and we know that is a very UNSAVORY reality." – Don Libey, direct marketing advisor

unrenumerative (un-re-NEW-mer-ah-tiv), adjective

A job, investment, business venture, or other activity that pays little or no financial return.

"We find the wealth of our cities mingled with poverty and UNRENUMERATIVE toil." – Grover Cleveland

untenable (uhn-TEN-uh-bull), adjective

Not possible to defend, as an argument or position.

"Are the legitimate compensation and honors that should come as the result of ability and merit to be denied on the UNTENABLE ground of sex aristocracy?" – Bertha Honore Potter Palmer, American socialite

unwieldy (un-WEEL-dee), adjective

Not easy to handle or to manage.

"Now mark me how I will undo myself. / I give this heavy weight from off my head, / And this UNWIELDY sceptre from my hand, / The pride of kingly sway from out my heart." – William Shakespeare

upbraid (up-BRAYD), verb

To censure or to find fault with.

We had to UPBRAID our butler severely when we learned he was gossiping to other members of our staff.

urbane (err-BANE), adjective

Suave, sophisticated, refined, cosmopolitan, and well versed in the ways of high society.

Even in his knock-around tennis whites, Brett always manages to appear URBANE.

urbanization (ur-ban-ih-ZAY-shun), noun

The growth of cities brought about by a population shift from rural areas and small communities to larger ones.

URBANIZATION, which began in the United States in the late 1800s, was in part triggered by the shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial one.

usurper (you-SIR-per), noun

A person who seizes a position of power through illegal means, force, or deception.

"A USURPER in the guise of a benefactor is the enemy that we are now to encounter and overcome." – William Leggett, American poet and fiction writer

usury (USE-err-ee), noun

To charge illegally high or excessive interest rates on a loan.

Loan sharks lend money at USURIOUS rates, and break your legs if you don't make back the principal with interest on time.

utilitarian (you-till-ih-TAYR-ee-an), adjective

Showing preference for things and ideas that are practical and utterly pragmatic while eschewing the fanciful and useless.

Paul's UTILITARIAN mindset makes him an ideal trader on Wall Street.

utopia (you-TOE-pee-uh), noun

A perfect or ideal society.

Many of us who are accustomed to wealth have learned to accept that we must make our own UTOPIAS, rather than to rely on the actions of outside forces or agencies.

uxorious (uhk-SAWR-ee-us), adjective

Doting on one's wife to an excessive degree.

"The same things change their names at such a rate; / For instance—passion in a lover's glorious, / But in a husband is pronounced UXORIOUS." –Lord Byron, British Romantic poet

“One impulse from a VERNAL
wood / May teach you more of man, /
Of moral evil and of good, / Than all
the sages can.”

William Wordsworth, British
Romantic poet

vacillate (VAH-sill-ate), verb

To swing back and forth between two points.

"But modern character is inconstant, divided, VACILLATING, lacking the stone-like certitude of archaic man…." – Saul Bellow, American author

vacuous (VAK-yoo-us), adjective

Devoid of emotion, intelligence, or any normal human thought processes; stupid; moronic.

The VACUOUS stare from her two eyes, looking like raisins pushed into a lump of dough, made him shiver with loathing and contempt.

vagary (VAY-guh-ree), noun

A random or unexpected occurrence.

One needs to accept the VAGARIES of life if one is to be happy or at least content.

vainglorious (vayne-GLOR-ee-us), adjective

Conceited; boastful; prone to showing off and bragging.

Although the scion of a well-established family, Gordon is so VAINGLORIOUS that you'd think him a parvenu!

valuation (val-you-AYE-shun), noun

The calculated worth or value of an asset, based on a rigorous appraisal.

One of the accounting firm's services is business VALUATION, where you can pay to have an accurate appraisal of what your business would sell for if acquired.

vanguard (VAN-gard), noun

That which is at the forefront or the leading edge; the most advanced group.

Robert is among the VANGUARD of area oenophiles.

vapid (VAH-pid), adjective

Dull; void of intellectual curiosity or intelligence; lacking spirit and enthusiasm; dull, routine, unchallenging.

What irked him most about his sister-in-law was her VAPID stares in response to simple questions, conversation, and jokes.

variegated (VAIR-ee-ih-gate-ed), adjective

That which changes color or contains different hues of the same color.

A lawn covered in VARIEGATED fallen leaves is the sign that autumn is finally here.

vehement (VEE-heh-ment), adjective

Insistent; unyielding in one's opinion or decision; intense inflexibility about matters.

Milly, a chronic worry wart, was VEHEMENT about her children calling her if they were going to be late getting home from school.

venal (VEE-null), adjective

Refers to people who can be bought, bribed, or otherwise persuaded to deviate from their beliefs and purpose.

"Give me but the liberty of the press, and I will give to the minister a VENAL House of Commons." – Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Irish playwright and statesman

venerable (VEN-err-uh-bull), adjective

An individual or institution that is respected and revered, sometimes because of achievement, intelligence, or character; but just as often as a result of being around a long time.

"Is the babe young? When I behold it, it seems more VENERABLE than the oldest man." – Henry David

Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

venial (VEE-nee-ul), adjective

A pardonable offense; a minor misdeed for which one is easily forgiven.

Cassidy was initially angry that Carley lied to her about where she bought her vintage handbag, but soon deemed the deed VENIAL.

veracity (ver-ASS-ih-tea), noun

The characteristic or habit of being truthful and conforming to accepted standards of behavior.

"The world is upheld by the VERACITY of good men: they make the earth wholesome." – Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet, essayist, and transcendentalist

verbiage (VER-bee-ij), noun

Words; in particular, prose written to fill space and impress others rather than communicate ideas and information.

"There's some white space on the back page of the sales brochure," the marketing manager told his ad agency, "so let's fill it with some VERBIAGE about service and quality."

verbose (ver-BOHS), adjective

Describes a person or composition using more words than are needed to get the point across.

Long-winded and VERBOSE, Mitch made his team members groan whenever he stood up to speak at a charity event.

verdant (VUR-dant), adjective

Lush with trees, bushes, ferns, and other green foliage.

With its careful mix of plants, the Whittingtons' formal garden remains VERDANT year-round.

veritable (VER-ih-tah-bull), adjective

Genuine; the real thing; a perfect specimen or example.

"For me, the child is a VERITABLE image of becoming, of possibility, poised to reach towards what is not yet, towards a growing that cannot be predetermined or prescribed." – Maxine Greene, American philosopher and educator

vernacular (ver-NAK-you-lar), adjective, noun

The language of a particular region or specific group of people.

Communicating with stockbrokers is difficult for many investors because they do not speak the VERNACULAR of the financial world.

vernal (VER-nul), adjective

Related to spring.

"One impulse from a VERNAL wood / May teach you more of man, / Of moral evil and of good, / Than all the sages can." – William Wordsworth, British Romantic poet

vers libre (VERSS-LEE-breh), noun

Free verse, a style of poetry requiring no rhyme or meter.

H. L. Mencken observed that VERS LIBRE is "a device for making poetry easier to write and harder to read."

vertiginous (ver-TIJ-uh-nuss), adjective

Causing vertigo, imbalance, dizziness, or stumbling.

Mallory and Michael enjoyed their weekend getaway to Paris, spending many moments staring at the Parisian skyline from the VERTIGINOUS heights of the Eiffel Tower.

vestigial (VESS-tih-jee-ul), adjective

Describes a remaining sample or trace of something that is disappearing or has already all but disappeared.

Some babies are born with a VESTIGIAL tail at the base of the spine.

vexation (vek-SAY-shin), noun

Frustration, annoyance, or irritation resulting from some action, occurrence, or statement.

"There is not much less VEXATION in the government of a private family than in the managing of an entire state." – Michel de Montaigne, Renaissance scholar

vicariously (vye-KARE-ee-uss-lee), adverb

To enjoy imagined feelings and experiences largely by observing or hearing about another person's life and adventures.

Married for over twenty-five years, Roger often told his single friends that he lived VICARIOUSLY through them.

vicissitudes (vi-SIS-ih-toods), noun

The constant change of one's situation or condition, common throughout life.

"VICISSITUDES of fortune, which spares neither man nor the proudest of his works, which buries empires and cities in a common grave." – Edward Gibbon, British historian

vignette (vin-YET), noun

A brief story, incident, or episode, usually told to illustrate some point.

Adding a VIGNETTE or two to a speech can help make abstract ideas clearer.

vindicate (VIN-dih-kate), verb

To prove your opinion is correct, or your action justified, or that you are innocent of a misdeed you stand accused of, despite opinions and evidence to the contrary.

We laughed at Paulette's predictions about the imminent fall fashions, but, once the couture was unveiled, Paulette was VINDICATED.

visage (VIZ-aj), noun

Face or overall appearance.

When the doctor entered the patient lounge, his grim VISAGE told the whole story before he could say a word.

visceral (VIS-er-ul), adjective

An immediate and strong gut reaction; a quickly formed opinion, based mainly on instinct and usually negative in nature.

"[Multiculturalism's] passions are political; its assumptions empirical; its conception of identities VISCERAL." – Joyce Appleby, American historian

vitriol (vih-tree-AWL), noun

An attitude of bitterness, hatred, or mean-spiritedness.

The school board reprimanded the coach with VITRIOL.

vituperative (veye-TOO-pre-tiv), adjective

A person who is bitter and angry, and readily takes that anger out on those around them.

VITUPERATIVE to an unreasonable degree, George smashed one of Jessica's prized dishes for every one of his old golf clubs she had given away when cleaning out the garage.

vivacious (vy-VAY-shuss), adjective

Joyful; happy, spirited; possessing a positive attitude about and enthusiasm for life; a person who lives life to the fullest.

Even after her family maintained some steep revenue losses, Sandra retained her VIVACIOUS character.

vociferous (vo-SIF-er-uss), adjective

Something said loudly so as to gain the listener's attention; a person who speaks loudly so as to gain attention.

"Let the singing singers / With vocal voices, most VOCIFEROUS, / In sweet vociferation out-vociferize / Even sound itself." – Henry Carey, English poet

volitional (voe-LISH-uhn-uhl), adjective

Describes an action performed or thought achieved through deliberate and conscious effort.

Our servants' persistent and VOLITIONAL attention to detail makes them absolutely indispensable to us.

voluptuous (vuh-LUP-chew-us), adjective

Anything arising from or giving extreme sensory or sensual pleasure.

A VOLUPTUOUS banquet was the highlight of the Masterlys' Thanksgiving gala.

voracious (vo-RAY-shuss), adjective

Possessing a huge and insatiable appetite, whether for food, knowledge, amusement, or something else.

Her son always had a VORACIOUS desire for knowledge. He read anything he could get his hands on and was always willing to experience something new.

vortex (VOR-teks), noun

Liquid or gas swirling in a spiral that sucks everything in or near it toward its center; a problem or situation that draws in everyone around it.

The permanent whirlpool where the river goes underground is a dark VORTEX sucking in everything in its current.

vox populi (VOKS-pop-you-LYE), noun

Expression of the prevailing mood, concerns, and opinions in a country.

In response to an environmentally friendly VOX POPULI, more and more corporations are "going green."

“In our WANDERLUST, we are
lovers looking for consummation.”

Anatole Broyard, literary critic
for the New York Times

W

waft (WAFT), verb
To carry lightly, as if caught in a breeze.

> "This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing / To WAFT me from distraction." – Lord Byron, British Romantic poet

waggish (WAG-ish), adjective
Joking, witty, and mischievous.
"This species of 'fame' a WAGGISH acquaintance says can be manufactured to order, and sometimes is so manufactured." – Herman Melville, American author

waif (WAFE), noun
A stray person or animal.
The occasional nouveau riche WAIF may float into our circle, but she rarely lasts long.

wan (WAHN), adjective
Showing or suggesting ill health or unhappiness.
"So shaken as we are, so WAN with care, / Find we a time for frighted peace to pant." – William Shakespeare

wanderlust (WON-dehr-lust), noun
A strong and innate desire to travel far from home.
"In our WANDERLUST, we are lovers looking for consummation." – Anatole Broyard, literary critic for the New York Times

wane (WAYN), verb
To gradually decrease; to fade away; to become diminished.
Once she finally received the Cartier watch from her father, Karen's interest in the timepiece quickly WANED.

wangle (WANG-guhl), verb
To accomplish by underhanded methods.
Jennifer managed to WANGLE an invitation to the Clarksons' party, even though she is the gauchest of the area's parvenus.

wanton (WAHN-tn), adjective
Loose, lascivious, and lewd.
Robert is so WANTON that women stay away from him in spite of his family's connections.

waspish (WOS-pish), adjective
Irascible and petulant; given to resentment.
Rebecca can be WASPISH, but we forgive her because she gives the best galas.

wassail (WAH-sull), noun
A salute or toast given when drinking to someone's health, well-being, or success.
We lost count of the mugs of beer consumed with the numerous WASSAILS to our teacher wishing him a happy retirement.

watershed (WAW-ter-shed), noun
An important event that signals the beginning of a new era or phase.
We knew it was a WATERSHED event when the Smythingtons did not hold their annual New Year's Eve gala last year.

watermark (WAW-terr-mark), noun
A faint design, graphic, or lettering pressed into paper while it is still in pulp form.
The CEO's classy letterhead bears a WATERMARK of the company logo.

wayfaring (WAY-fair-ing), adjective
Traveling on foot.
We spent many WAYFARING weekends during our month-long jaunt in France last year.

weal (WEEL), noun
Prosperous well-being; vitality.
Jordan is convinced that expensive jewelry is necessary for one's WEAL and welfare.

weir (WEERE), noun
A low dam or barrier built across a river either to control water levels or catch fish.
When the water level in the Passaic River lowered during a drought, a stone WEIR built by Indians for catching fish became visible.

weltschmerz (VELT-schmayrtz), noun
A lingering sorrow that some believe is a given in life.
When we snubbed Margaret for buying so many fashion knockoffs, her WELTSCHMERZ lasted until we forgave her.

wend (WEND), verb
To go; to proceed.

> "As they WEND away / A voice is heard singing / Of Kitty, or Katy, / As if the name meant once / All love, all beauty." – Philip Larkin, British poet, novelist, and jazz critic

whelp (WEHLP), noun
A despised person or his or her offspring.
"'Twas Slander filled her mouth with lying words, / Slander, the foulest WHELP of Sin." – Robert Pollok, Scottish poet

wherewithal (WAIR-with-all), noun
Means or resources; money.
We certainly have the WHEREWITHAL to visit that restaurant, but we will not because the maître d' does not know his place.

whimsical (WIHM-zih-kuhl), adjective
Erratic, unpredictable, capricious.
"How truly does this journal contain my real and undisguised thoughts—I always write it according to the humour I am in, and if a stranger was to think it worth reading, how capricious—insolent & WHIMSICAL I must appear!" – Frances Burney, British novelist, diarist, and playwright

wily (WHY-lee), adjective
Crafty and cunning.
When it comes to parting Brock from his inheritance, the normally charming Mallory can be quite WILY.

winnow (WIN-oh), verb
To find what one is looking for through a process of elimination in which many candidates are considered but only a few are chosen.

Selma WINNOWED through her wardrobe until she found the perfect Vera Wang gown to wear to the New Year's Eve ball.

winsome (WIN-suhm), adjective

Winning and engaging; charming.

Lydia looked quite WINSOME throughout her coming out party.

wistful (WIHST-full), adjective

Yearning, pensive; having an unfulfilled desire.

> "I never saw a man who looked / With such a WISTFUL eye / Upon that little tent of blue / Which prisoners call the sky." – Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright and poet

witticism (WIT-uh-siz-uhm), noun

A witty or clever remark.

We love our servants because they are so full of WITTICISMS about people of their class.

wizened (WIZ-uhnd), adjective

Withered; shriveled; dried up

Moira spent so much time out in the sun during her Mediterranean trip that she came back positively WIZENED.

wont (WAWNT), adjective or noun

Accustomed; or, a custom or practice.

"I am WONT to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much the freer." – Henry David Thoreau, American author and transcendentalist

wrest (REST), verb

To pull away; to take something by force or threat.

> "WREST once the law to your authority: / To do a great right, do a little wrong." – William Shakespeare

wunderkind (WUHN-der-kind), noun

One who succeeds in business, or a similar endeavor, at a comparatively young age.

Alex would be a WUNDERKIND in the firm even without his father's connections.

Such epithets, like pepper, / Give ZEST to what you write; / And, if you strew them sparely, / They whet the appetite: / But if you lay them on too thick, / You spoil the matter quite!""

Lewis Carroll, English author and logician

X, Y, & Z

Xanadu (ZAN-uh-dyoo), noun
A place of perfect, idyllic beauty.

> "In XANADU did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure-dome decree: / Where Alph, the sacred river, ran / Through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea" – Samuel Taylor Coleridge, English poet

xanthic (ZAN-thick), adjective
Of a yellowish tint or color.

After Laura wore a XANTHIC dress to the spring ball, the area's nouveau riche followed her example at subsequent galas.

Xanthippe (zan-TIP-ee), noun
An ill-tempered, shrewish woman.

Felicia is far from a XANTHIPPE simply because she interacts only with certain members of the household staff.

xebec (ZEE-beck), noun
A small, three-masted ship used in the Mediterranean for commerce that once was a favorite vessel of the leisure class.

All of the amassed XEBECS ruined the otherwise spectacular views from our villa during the month we spent on the Greek Isles.

xenocurrency (zen-uh-KURR-uhn-see), noun
Money that is circulated or traded in money markets outside its country of issue.

The Wallaces stopped speculating in XENOCURRENCY once rumors of a worldwide recession began circulating.

xenogamy (zih-NAHG-uh-me), noun
Cross-pollination among plant species.

The secret of our award-winning formal gardens is the careful use of XENOGAMY.

xenophile (ZEN-uh-file), noun
Someone who is attracted to foreign styles, customs, manners, etc.

All of us are XENOPHILES because American customs and cultural products are so gauche.

xenophobic (zee-nah-FOE-bik), adjective
Having an irrational fear of foreigners and immigrants.

We are not XENOPHOBIC; we dislike all strangers, regardless of their backgrounds, unless they are brought to us by other social contacts.

xenoplastic (ZEN-uh-plass-tick), adjective
Of, or occurring between, distantly related individuals.

We always have the senders of cards and letters carefully screened because some of us have been involved in XENOPLASTIC schemes by which total strangers suggested they belong to our family.

xerochilia (ZEER-uh-kile-ee-uh), noun
Dryness of the lips.

Kyle may be cute, but the way he treats his chronic XEROCHILIA with common lip balm is nothing short of distasteful.

xerophyte (ZER-oh-fight), noun

A cactus, succulent, or other plant that has adapted to living in a desert with limited rainfall or irritation.

We make use of a XEROPHYTE garden at our southwest desert estate.

xerosis (zih-ROH-sis), noun

The typical hardening of aging skin and tissue.

Ophelia constantly visits European spas to slow the onset of XEROSIS.

xiphoid (ZIE-foid), adjective

Shaped like a sword.

We can always spot Carlson's private plane because it is covered with the same XIPHOID shapes that adorn his family's crest.

xylography (zie-LAHG-ruh-fee), noun

The art of engraving wood.

Even though it is not particularly valuable, we keep great-grandfather's XYLOGRAPHY collection because it meant something to him.

yahoo (YAH-hoo), noun

A boorish, uncultivated, common person.

"Factory windows are always broken. / Somebody's always throwing bricks, / Somebody's always heaving cinders, / Playing ugly YAHOO tricks." – Vachel Lindsay, American poet

yammer (YAM-uhr), verb

To whine or complain loudly and at length.

The way Roland YAMMERS about being thrown out of Yale, you'd think he hadn't begged his father to make the expulsion happen!

yantra (YAHN-truh), noun

A geometric diagram used to help one meditate.

During Eloise's foray into Buddhism, she kept forgetting her mantra, so her teacher gave her a YANTRA that she could affix to the wall in front of her meditation cushion.

yardarm (YAHRD-arm), noun

Either of the outer portions of a square sail.

During the regatta, the yachts sailed YARDARM to YARDARM, appearing as though they may collide at any moment.

yare (YARE), adjective

Quick and agile; lively.

Thanks to the gymnastics she performed at finishing school, Amanda has a YARE and limber body.

yaw (YAW), verb

An erratic, side-to-side motion; or, to swerve.

A fast-moving cold front caused Sasha's Learjet 60 to YAW dangerously for several minutes.

yawnful (YAWN-full), adjective

Arousing tedium or boredom.

Eleanor's YAWNFUL story about her month doing volunteer work made many of us bolt for the doors.

yawp (YAWP), noun, verb

A raucous, clamorous noise; or, to make such a noise.

"I sound my barbaric YAWP over the roofs of the world." – Walt

Whitman, American poet and humanist

yearling (YEER-ling), adjective or noun
Of a year's duration; or, an animal in its second year.
Many of our family's racehorses are YEARLINGS, which we put to pasture after their retirement.

yen (YEN), noun
A strong desire or urge.
"Perhaps one subtext of the health care debate is a YEN to be treated like a whole person, not just an eye, an ear, a nose or a throat." – Anna Quindlen, American author and opinion columnist

yenta (YEN-tuh), noun
A woman considered a busybody or gossip.
Spreading rumors among ourselves is one thing, but Rebecca has gained a reputation as a YENTA because she also blabs to the help.

yeoman (YOH-muhn), adjective, noun
Pertaining to or one who performs arduous tasks in a loyal and workmanlike manner.
We promoted Helga to upstairs maid because of her YEOMAN work ethic.

yob (YAHB), noun
A cruel and loutish young man; a bully.
"Mick Jagger, alternately slurring YOB and lisping lordling, is classlessness apotheosised." – Phillip Norman, British author

yokel (YOH-kuhl), noun
A gullible inhabitant of a rural area.
"[A human being] is the YOKEL par excellence, the booby unmatchable, the king dupe of the cosmos." – H. L. Mencken, American magazine editor, essayist, and critic

younker (YAHN-kuhr), noun
A young man or child.
Alex has been a fine horseman since he was a mere YOUNKER, playing with his family's thoroughbreds.

zabaglione (zah-buhl-YOH-knee), noun
An Italian dessert delicacy featuring a foamy, custard-like mix of egg yolks, sugar, and wine.
Even though the café has been discovered by the general public, we still go to it for its delectable ZABAGLIONE.

za-zen (ZAH-ZEN), noun
Meditation in a cross-legged posture.
Christopher has taken to practicing ZA-ZEN, but at heart, we know his goal is still acquisition of wealth and power, not personal enlightenment.

zeal (ZEEL), noun
Great enthusiasm and energy for a cause or activity.
"The living, vital truth of social and economic well-being will become a reality only through the ZEAL, courage, the non-compromising determination of intelligent minorities, and not through the mass." – Emma Goldman, Bolshevik anarchist

zealot (ZEL-it), noun
A rabid follower; a true believer; a fanatical advocate.
"What a noble aim is that of the ZEALOT who tortures himself like a madman in order to desire nothing, love

nothing, feel nothing, and who, if he succeeded, would end up a complete monster!" – Denis Diderot, French philosopher

zeitgeist (ZITE-gahyst), noun

The prevailing viewpoints, attitudes, and beliefs of a given generation or period in history.

In the twenty-first century, "going green" is very much at the forefront of the nation's ZEITGEIST, as people have been made aware of the importance of being good stewards of our planet's natural resources.

zelig (ZEH-lig), noun

A chameleonlike person who seems omnipresent.

The parvenus try so hard to be ZELIGS, blending in seamlessly at our functions, but we can always spot them for the intruders they are.

zen (ZEHN), verb

Generally speaking, to figure out the answer to a difficult problem with a flash of sudden insight.

After days of indecision regarding which gala to attend on a particular night, Danielle managed to ZEN the answer and make her choice.

zenith (ZEE-nith), noun

The highest point attained; the peak.

"This dead of midnight is the noon of thought, / And Wisdom mounts her ZENITH with the stars." - Anna Letitia Barbauld, English poet and children's author

zephyr (ZEFF-uhr), noun

A gentle breeze.

"Soft is the strain when ZEPHYR gently blows, / And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows." – Alexander Pope, British poet

zest (ZEHST), noun

Extreme enjoyment; a lust for life

"Such epithets, like pepper, / Give ZEST to what you write; / And, if you strew them sparely, / They whet the appetite: / But if you lay them on too thick, / You spoil the matter quite!" – Lewis Carroll, English author and logician

Zionism (ZYE-on-iz-um), noun

The modern political movement to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

The Wasserstein's give charitably not only to the community, but also in support of ZIONISM because the family has many relatives living in Palestine.

zonifugal (zoh-niff-YOU-gull), adjective

Passing out of, or away from, a region.

Our multinational European jaunt contained many ZONIFUGAL changes that, often, caused us to feel disoriented.

zonk (ZAWNK), verb

To stun or stupefy.

We were positively ZONKED by Marie's choice of couture for the very important Sanderson gala.

zoomorphic (zoe-uh-MORE-fihk), adjective

Having the form of an animal.

The Rossington's formal garden is peppered with delightfully ZOOMORPHIC topiaries that seem to mix flora and fauna in equal measure.

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Bob Bly, who has taught writing as an adjunct professor at New York University, is a freelance copywriter. His clients include Lucent Technologies, PSE&G, IBM, Kiplinger, Boardroom, ITT Fluid Technology, Praxair, and Medical Economics.

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Bob has written more than seventy books including Careers for Writers (McGraw-Hill/VGM) and The Elements of Business Writing (Alyn & Bacon). His articles have appeared in Amtrak Express, Cosmopolitan, Early to Rise, Bits & Pieces for Salespeople, Successful Meetings, Writer's Digest, and many other publications. He is a regular columnist for Target Marketing and The Writer.

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"Having an extensive vocabulary is the fundamental
building block for thinking, communication, and learning. The better
you are able to think, communicate, and learn, the better your chances for success."
—Celeste Stewart

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